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"IT IS THE WAR-CLOUD, MY FATHER'S FRIGATE, ASHORE ON A REEF AND BESET BY PIRATES!"

The Red Privateer;

OR,

THE MIDSHIPMAN ROVER.

A ROMANCE OF 1812.

BY NED BUNTLINE,

CHAPTER I.

SHOT AT BY HIS OWN FATHER.

THE U. S. frigate War-Cloud, her anchor nearly apeak, her sails loose and ready for hoisting, lay off the city, in Boston harbor, the signal "All hands on board" flying from her fore-truck. The pilot fretted because he was losing the ebb tide, which, with the wind ahead, was so necessary to make a quick run to sea.

And old Captain Brent, who had served in the navy from its first inception, strode the quarter-deck in fierce anger. With two exceptions, all hands were on board.

One was Long Tom Breeze, the coxswain of his gig and captain of fore-castle, who had overstayed his liberty on shore by four-and-twenty hours.

The other was the captain's only son, Midshipman Harry Brent, who had been sent on shore to find and bring Breeze off, for he was one of the best men in the crew and could not well be spared, especially as the ship was short-handed for the long cruise before her.

The War-Cloud had been ordered to the Asiatic station, where Captain Brent, as senior captain, next on the list for promotion to commodore, was to assume command of the little fleet kept in those waters to protect our commerce from piracy and wrong.

Suddenly a skiff shot out from the end of Long Wharf, with only one person in it—a fair-haired young man in naval uniform.

"The dinghy is coming off, sir—with Midshipman Brent in it, alone!"

The first lieutenant, glass in hand, reported thus to the captain.

The captain's face wore the fiery hue of anger, but he returned the salute of his executive, and never ceased his walk while he waited for the arrival of his son.

In a few minutes the young officer was alongside and on deck. He had but time to touch his cap in salute to the first lieutenant, when his father, with a frown, not waiting for his report, thundered out the question:

"Where is the man you were sent after, sir?"

"At home with his sick wife—she is dying, sir!" was the reply. "I could not take him away from her, sir, and their little babe not six months old!"

"Coward! Shame to the name you bear and the uniform you wear! You were sent on duty—not on an errand of mercy. How dare you disobey orders?"

"Father—hear me!"

"Silence, sir! I will hear no explanation. You have shrunk from your duty—you are no son of mine!"

"Very well, sir; I have then no business here!" and turning on his heel, the noble-looking boy, whose blue eyes flashed with the fury of mortification and unmerited disgrace, went quickly over the side, sprung into the boat in which he came and pulled toward the shore.

"Come back, sir, or the sentry shall shoot you down!" shouted the angry captain.

"Let him fire! I am ready!" cried the brave boy, and laying in his oars, he rose in the boat and folded his arms in defiance over his breast.

"Fire on him, sentinel, fire on him!" shouted the infuriated captain, addressing the marine who walked his post in the waist of the ship with a loaded musket at a shoulder.

The soldier fired, but shot wide of the mark. There was not a man upon the frigate who did not love the brave, free-hearted boy.

"Ten thousand curses! Load and hand me that gun. I'll show you there is one man on this deck who knows his duty!" shouted the now insanely furious officer, for a taunting laugh came back from the boy in the frail skiff.

The gun was loaded, and the captain snatching it from the marine, leveled it full at the form of his defiant son.

"Great Heaven! This must not be!" cried the first lieutenant, when he saw that the father was indeed taking deliberate aim at his son.

And just as the captain's finger pressed the trigger of the gun, the lieutenant knocked the muzzle up, and the ball again flew wide of the human target.

"Go below, sir—under arrest!" shouted the captain, wilder now than ever, as he turned upon the officer who had saved him from being a murderer.

The lieutenant bowed and left the deck, while Captain Brent turned to the second lieutenant, and cried out:

"Get under way at once, sir. Crowd on sail, and head for sea!"

He did not even cast another glance at the

boy, who, now quietly resumed his oars, and pulled ashore.

"Enter Midshipman Brent and Tom Breeze on the log as deserters!" he added, and then he entered his cabin.

The capstan-bars were instantly manned, and the boatswain forward sung out:

"She's broke ground, sir!"

"Sheets and halliards!" cried the officer of the deck. "Run up and cat the anchor! Sheet home and hoist away! Flatten in head-sheets—tend braces! Shift the helm for stern-board!"

All this was done almost as quickly as the orders left the officer's lips, and in a few minutes the noble ship, fully under sail, was turned over to the pilot, on her way to sea.

And it was a noble sight. Everything set from royals down, to fill with an eastern breeze fresh enough to almost dip the muzzles of her lower-deck guns, which would be housed inside of closed ports, when once out of the harbor, she moved—a thing of life and beauty—through the smooth water of the land-locked port.

Her signals down, only her streaming pennant and the ensign at her gaff told what she was—a model American man-of-war.

Alone in his cabin, Captain Brent, with no human eye to see, or human ear to listen, became a man once more.

Kneeling by the cot in his state-room, tears coursed down his cheeks, and in a trembling voice he said:

"Forgive me, merciful God, forgive me! In my anger—I know not what I do! I am punished—I have lost mine only son, the pride and joy of my life! I feel that I shall see him no more. He will not live to bear disgrace and carry the foul name I have put upon him!"

For a half-hour that gray-haired officer knelt, and wept, and prayed, with a heart almost breaking. He who had faced the storms of battle a hundred times without a fear, now gave way like a child, the victim of remorse.

Meantime, tacking when she approached either shore, the frigate was making swift way toward her ocean home, handled by men who knew their duty aloft and below—men fit indeed to battle for a nation's life and honor.

An hour later the captain had conquered his weakness. Once more calm, he stepped to his wash-room and removed the traces of his late agitation; then went out on deck, just as the ship, making her last tack, stretched out toward the blue expanse of ocean, where his boat, with head-sheets drawn, waited to receive the pilot.

When the latter left the frigate, the second lieutenant reported to the captain "all clear," and asked if he should send one watch below.

"No, sir, not yet!" said the captain, gently. "Keep all hands on deck and send a midshipman below to Lieutenant Neville and let him say I desire his presence on the quarter-deck!"

In a few minutes the first lieutenant stood in the presence of his captain.

"Call all hands aft, Mr. Howard!" said the captain, to his second officer. "When I do a public wrong, the reparation must be quite as public!"

When the crew came aft, with wonder in their eyes, the captain said, loud enough to be heard by all:

"Lieutenant Neville, we have sailed together for three long cruises, and never until to-day have I let my unruly temper get the better of me so far as to do you an injustice. While I restore you to duty, I thank you for saving me from committing a crime which I shudder now to think of. Help me by your kind forbearance to bear a sorrow which no time can lessen. Pipe one watch below, sir, and tell the sailing-master to head for Bermuda, where we will stop for fruit and vegetables for the crew!"

Mr. Neville, almost too full to speak, bowed low, and when the captain returned to his cabin, gave the orders required.

CHAPTER II.

LONG TOM BREEZE BESIDE HIS DEAD.

HARRY BRENT was no coward. It fairly set his heart on fire when that name came hot and furious from the lips of his martinet father. And when he rose in the little boat, and bared his breast to receive the shot which he heard his father's lips order fired, he prayed for death to cover the degradation he had received before officers and crew.

He smiled when he saw the bullet strike the water a hundred feet to his right.

"They love and will not harm me!" he murmured.

But he saw his father snatch the gun from the marine and take a steady aim, and his heart grew sick—not with fear, but with horror at the act from such a source; yet he did not turn away, but saw the noble act of Lieutenant Neville which saved his life, for his father was a sure shot.

"It is over!" he said, as he sunk down to his oars again. "I will never see the face of him who would take the life his cruel words have darkened forever. Henceforth—I fight life's battles all alone. I had a bright career before me, but now—he, the author of my life, has blasted it!"

Reaching the wharf, he ascended the steps

without even taking pains to fasten the boat to the left. Glancing over the water he saw the sails going up and knew that the frigate was getting under way and would go to sea at once and without him.

"A coward and a deserter! That's what they'll log me!" he muttered, bitterly. "Oh for a war—a war upon the ocean where I can prove what I'm made of!"

How little did he think that such a war was even then impending—a war which would red- den many a deck and give heroes every chance that man could ask to prove their title to patriotism and courage.

He stood there, sadly silent, until he saw the noble ship filling away under full sail—heading out for sea under the command of a father whom he yet loved in spite of his harsh injustice, for the young officer would not look at it in any other light.

His bright hopes of early promotion, his ambition for a glorious career faded as the ship went from his gaze, and his heart was full of agony.

"I will go and see how poor Tom gets along," he said. "He is the cause of all my trouble, but I love him none the less for it. But for his bravery and devotion, I would have been shark-food a year ago when I fell overboard off Martinique. My father has forgotten it, but I never will, and while I have life and strength, both shall go to serve him as far as I can."

He walked with a rapid gait up into the city. On a narrow street he entered a small, old-fashioned house, which seemed to be inhabited by more than one family, for he passed at least two open doors where children were seen within, playing on the floor, and grown persons moving about.

But at a door in the rear part of the house he paused and knocked.

"Come in," said a deep and manly voice—yet it had a choked expression of grief in it.

The young officer opened the door on a scene which he never could forget.

The light, shining through a back window, fell on the face of a young woman, who must have been very lovely before disease thinned down her classic features. Now it was still and white—the eyes closed, and the dark, fringing lashes lying on the marble cheek. The frosted touch of Death had stiffened all expression—even a look of agony was frozen there.

Upon a lovely bosom, partly bare, a sweet babe lay sleeping.

And above them, his hands clasped in wretched helplessness, his tall frame quivering with silent sorrow, his bronzed face tearless, but, oh! how full of suffering, bent poor Tom Breeze—the husband, father, MAN—who had staid with her to the last, closed the dear eyes which could see no more, and kissed the lips that breathed a blessing and a prayer for him ere they were still forever.

It was pitiful to look upon.

Slowly Tom turned his wan face to see who entered.

"Ah—is it you, Master Harry?" he said, mournfully. "You can take me now—it's all over—she's gone—she's gone!"

And dropping on his knees, bending over the still form, he burst out in a flood of tears, and his sobs seemed to rend his very form apart.

The babe, awakened by this terrible outpouring of grief, added its wailing cry, and young Brent hurried to take it up, and try to soothe its terror.

There was a basin of milk on a table near, and a spoon, and though all unused to the duties of a nurse, he tried to feed, and thus still its cries. He succeeded, for a wonder—it was hungry, and greedily sucked down the nourishment he gently poured into the sweet little mouth. And its large blue eyes grew gently bright as they looked up in his kind face, and a smile, soft as a morning sunbeam, made the little face look angelic. At least Harry Brent thought so, and he said in his heart that, while he lived, the motherless child should never be friendless.

He had never known a mother's love—he was but a babe himself when his mother died, and he felt how hard it was to never know that love.

Poor Tom Breeze wept a long time: then his sobs lessened, though the grief in his heart did not, and he looked around for his child. Its hunger satisfied, it was cooing in the arms of the midshipman.

"Master Harry—that is kind of you—more than I'd a right to expect—and I thank you from the bottom of a breaking heart. Let me bury poor Louise and find a home for the babe and I'll go off to the old War-Cloud without a word! You know I couldn't leave her a-dyin', when she had no one on earth but me to look to!"

"I know it, Tom—my brave, true friend—I know it, and you've only done your duty. If I've neglected mine—it's I that has to suffer, and no one else! But I'm afraid neither you nor I will see the War-Cloud again for many a year!"

"What, she hasn't gone and left you behind, Master Harry—you, the oldest midshipman on her roll-call?"

"Yes, Tom, and I'm in disgrace. My father called me a coward before all hands, abused me

as if I were a worthless cur, and I quit the ship. He ordered me back and bade the sentry shoot me down. The marine would not fire at me, and then—then my own father took aim to shoot me, and would have done it had not Lieutenant Neville knocked the gun-barrel up. The ball just cleared my head. And so—I've left the ship and the service too, I suppose, for all time. They'll log us both as *deserters* now, dear old Tom—but we're in the same boat. That's one comfort!"

"And all this you've done for me, Master Harry? I'm at the bottom of all your trouble!"

"Don't think of it, in that light, Tom. Brace up, like the brave, true man you are, and do your duty here. I've a little money left, and you are welcome to it. When we've made all snug ashore we'll find a berth at sea—together, for I never mean to part company with you, old man! We'll be true to each other, let the weather run fair or foul!"

"The Lord above bless you for them words, Master Harry. They're all I have of comfort now. How the baby takes to you!"

"I've been feeding it, Tom, and, little as it is, it knows a friendly hand!"

"Yes, Master Harry, that's natur'. But I must find it a nurse. There's a woman in the front room that Louise spoke well of—a hard-workin' woman with two or three of her own, but I reckon she'd grapple to this, if I pay her for lookin' to it. I wish you'd see her, sir—I can't leave Louise just yet!"

So Harry Brent went and had a talk with the woman in front, who was quite shocked to hear Tom's wife had gone off so sudden, though she had long been sick and the doctor had given her up to die—but not so soon.

The woman was a sailor's wife; her husband was off on a three years' cruise in a whaler; she had three children, the youngest only a baby—but, with a little money her husband had left her, and the pay she got by washing for some rich families, she was able to pay her rent and live comfortably, at least, for her rent was low and she had never been pressed hard for that. The house was Tom's now—it had belonged to his parents, but they were dead. And Louise had rented all the rooms but one, for she needed only that, whether he was with her or off on board his ship.

So the motherless babe had a home, and a kind nurse right in the house, and Mrs. Simonds was only too glad to take it on condition that rent was free, with another room to use, so she could do her washing and ironing in that and have the other room free from steam and dampness to live in.

After this was settled, Harry went to see the doctor to get a burial-certificate, and an undertaker to make preparations for the funeral, for poor Tom was so overwhelmed with grief he was poorly able to see to those things.

The women in the house prepared her body for the coffin, for the dead wife had ever been kind to them and all their sympathy went out for the grief-stricken husband.

The next day the funeral took place—slimly attended, it is true; nevertheless as sorrowful as if more pomp was seen.

After all was over, Midshipman Brent and Long Tom Breeze—as the latter was always known on board ship—held a serious conference over their future.

Tom had arranged for his babe, his little Louise, with Mrs. Simonds, who was to take care of his house and apply all the rents, over and above the taxes, to the benefit of the child in his absence.

"What is ahead for us, Master Harry?" was Tom's first question. "You've lost your berth all on my account, and it throws me all aback to think of it. Suppose we make sail for Washington and I spin the whole yarn to the Secretary of the Navy? He'll give ear to what we both say, maybe, and put you aboard another ship with your rank all right. As for me, anywhere, so be it is with you, and I'm content!"

"My father called me a coward, Tom, and he must take back those words before ever I put on my uniform again!" said Harry Brent, firmly.

He had already purchased a suit of plain clothing and put away his uniform in a chest belonging to Tom.

"I have an uncle in Baltimore," continued the young man. "He is a wealthy merchant and owns shipping and trades to foreign parts. He and my father fell out years ago—but for all that, I'm going right to him to ask for a berth in one of his vessels. I never saw him but once and he treated me then so kindly, I have never forgotten him. He will not refuse two good sailors like you and me, Tom, a chance to square yards with the world."

"I reckon not, Master Harry, and the sooner we sail for Baltimore the less we'll have to worry over!"

"True, and there's a packet sails to-morrow!" They both took passage in it.

CHAPTER III.

BEARDING THE LION IN HIS DEN.

"MR. CARROLL BRENT? Do I know where he lives? I reckon I do, sir—for he is the richest man in Baltimore!"

And the uniformed watchman on the wharf where Harry Brent and Long Tom Breeze had just landed, swelled with importance as he thus replied to the inquiry made by the young man.

"He has a house on Calvert street where he lives in the winter, and a country seat out in Montgomery county on Rock river. And—d'ye see that row of warehouses at the head of the wharf? They're all his'n, and if you want to lay eyes on him, most like you'll find him at his counting-room, middle of the block, just about this time o' day!"

"Thank you, sir—you are very kind!" returned Harry, with a smile.

"That's my style, young man—my style with them that looks decent and don't put on too many airs," and the pompous watchman gave his club a whirl, and proceeded along his beat.

"Follow me, Tom; we'll beard the lion in his den at once if he is there," announced Harry, laughing.

In a short time they stood in front of a row of brick warehouses, and paused in front of one in the center, where a small, plain sign contained these words:

"East and West India Goods at Wholesale,

"BY CARROLL BRENT."

A dapper little fellow, with a white cravat, a standing shirt-collar, and a pair of pants too tight to bend over in, stood in his shirt-sleeves on a front step, with a bill-book in his hands, superintending the loading of some boxes on a truck. His head was bare, and it should have been covered, for a very thin crop of yellow hair alone protected it from rather a damp breeze that came in from the harbor. He had an oldish look for one so boyishly dressed. He had surely seen thirty-five or forty years.

"Is Mr. Carroll Brent in his counting-room, sir?" asked Harry, looking the queer specimen over when he spoke.

"What d'ye want to know for? If you-uns want to ship, I can see to that. My name is Nicodemus Sparkle, with an Esquire to it when I'm addressed in writing."

"Mr. Nicodemus Sparkle, with or without an Esquire, I want to see Mr. Carroll Brent," replied Harry, sternly. "Can you tell me where I will find him?"

"I can, but I won't! Don't you see I'm busy?" spluttered the little fellow, flourishing his pencil as he checked off an item on his bill-book.

"Master Harry, shall I wring the bantam's neck? Your uncle wouldn't mind it, I reckon!" cried Long Tom, starting forward. "He can pick up plenty o' such roosters from any poor-house."

"Don't be hard on the poor thing—it doesn't know any better," said Harry, restraining Tom, who wanted to give the impertinent clerk a shaking.

"Beg pardon, sir—is Mr. Brent your uncle?" asked the crestfallen clerk, seeing a new feature in the case.

"Yes, sir—the brother of my father, Post Captain Brent of the United States Navy!" impressively.

"I beg you ten thousand pardons, sir—I really meant no offense, sir—I will show you at once to his counting-room. This way, sir—this way."

The slender legs danced along with a hippity, hoppity step, like a sand-piper going over pebbles at a brookside, in advance of Harry and Tom, through a long, dingy warehouse, into a large room back, which was nicely furnished and lighted by a huge swinging lamp in addition to a window, and was occupied by a dozen or more busy clerks, each at his desk with a large account book before him.

At a table in the center of the room, dictating to an amanuensis, sat a tall, fine-looking man, in whose dark hair threads of silver began to show.

"This young man wants to see you, sir," said the little, old clerk. "I took the liberty of bringing him in."

"Instead of directing him to come in, so you could learn his business, eh, Mr. Sparkle? Go back to your outside work, sir!" commanded the merchant, sternly.

And back at even a livelier sand-piper gait the little clerk traveled.

The merchant, who had been scanning the two visitors closely from the moment he heard their advancing steps, looking intently at Harry, said:

"Your face, young gentleman, seems strangely familiar to me, yet I cannot recall where I have seen you before."

"In New York, sir—ten years ago—I was but a boy of nine; but I have never forgotten your kind words to me then. You said I was a Brent in nature, as well as by name."

"Little Harry, as I live! I'm glad to see you, lad—very glad to see you. Who is this with you?"

"Long Tom Breeze, sir—one of the best sailors that ever went to sea, and a true man. He saved my life when no other in three hundred dared such a risk."

"Then he is doubly welcome—but your father! I thought he was at sea and you were a midshipman in his ship—the War-Cloud?"

"He is at sea, sir—went without me. It is a short story, but a sad one."

"When we were nearly ready to sail, I was sent on shore after coxswain Tom Breeze here, who had the liberty to visit his wife. I found him by her sick-bed—she was dying—her doctor said so. There, alone with her little babe by her side—could I force him to leave her?"

"No—NO!" said the merchant, nervously.

"I did not try; I went back to report the case. My father only saw that I had not brought Tom along, and broke out in a fury. He would listen to no explanation, and in his wild anger, before officers and crew, he called me a coward—a disgrace to my name and uniform. I could not stand that, sir!"

"I told him I would leave his ship, and did so. He ordered the sentinel to shoot me down. The marine fired his gun—but not at me."

"That made my father yet more furious, and he snatched up a musket to kill me with his own hand. He would have done so, had not the first lieutenant, Mr. Neville, knocked the gun up, so the ball went over my head."

"Horrible! Yet I know what his temper is. Ten years ago he quarreled with me most unreasonably."

"He has never held any communication with me since, though Heaven knows I bear no ill will to him!"

"But you are adrift now. Shall I write to the Secretary of the Navy and get you on another ship?"

"No, sir. I will yet reinstate myself and prove to him and the world I am not a coward!"

"You are not a coward, Harry. The very act which he condemned proved your courage. You dared to do right—had the courage to be merciful and face the consequences. As I take it, Tom's poor wife is dead?"

"Yes, sir; and buried, or he would not be here. His little six-months-old girl is left at nurse. So we are free and looking for a berth, for we both are seamen and know no other mode of life. Can't you take us on one of your ships, uncle?"

"Ay, right gladly, for good men are scarce, and I now send every craft I fit out armed and double-manned. England, with her arrogant claims of Right of Search and Impressment, is ruining our commerce and sweeping off the best men we have. And this country will not endure the wrong much longer."

"It is only a matter of time, short time, too—perhaps months, and maybe but a few weeks, when war will be forced upon us. Not satisfied that this country gained its independence by force of arms, she heaps insult upon insult, wrong upon wrong, until the nation, aroused, will fly to arms and win redress at the cannon's mouth!"

"Yes, sir; we will have war, and then—then, dear uncle, I will show you that I am worthy of the name I bear, and I will let my father learn what his 'coward' son is made of."

"Oh, how I wish that war was on us now! and that I had a fleet, well-armed privateer at my control! I'd sweep the sea, as Paul Jones did, and make Englishmen tremble in every port on their rock-bound coast!"

The merchant rose, fairly trembling with excitement. The clerks at their desks ceased to write, carried away by the enthusiasm of the boy.

"How old are you, Harry?" asked Mr. Brent.

"Almost twenty, sir—and I've been aboard ship all my life. There was no better navigator on my father's frigate—he has said so, often. I could sail her and fight her, too, as long as one plank of her held to another!"

"You'll go home with me to dinner, directly, nephew, you and your good friend, Tom Breeze. I think I've a craft you'll like—nearly ready for sea. We'll go to look at her after dinner, and—Well, we'll talk it all over after you've both had a look at her and know where I intend to send her! The man I wanted as a commander is sick in the hospital and may never live to come out of it, so the head doctor told me yesterday!"

"Is the crew shipped, sir?" asked Tom.

"Only partially. It is a long voyage and in waters which the English cover with their men-of-war. American seamen dread to go there. So it is slow work shipping a crew. But—we will see how they're getting on after dinner! Come along, both of you!"

The merchant led the way, and as he passed out saw Mr. Sparkle attending to his duties outside.

The little clerk bowed very low when his employer passed him. The merchant returned the salute carelessly and went on.

"Gosh all hemlock! I'll bet he's a-takin' them to dinner!" muttered Sparkle. "Don't I wish I was along? That young chap is han'-some—yes, pretty as a picture, and he'll see Miss Lucille and—gosh all hemlock—she'll fall in love with him! Then, good-by to hope for Nicodemus Sparkle with an Esquire to the end! Oh, whatever was I born for? It's too bad; I wish I had something to kick. I'd kick myself if I could!"

Just then a mangy-looking cur passed slowly in front of the warehouse and Nicodemus threw out one of his spindle-shanks in a spiteful kick at the animal.

The cur didn't run or yelp, but it doubled on him and set its sharp teeth full length into the slim calf of the leg before he could even draw it back.

"Murder! Ow! Ow! Gosh all hemlock! Take off the dog—take off the dog!" yelled Sparkle, to two or three truckmen who were near.

Seeing men rushing for him, the dog took himself off, carrying a good patch from the tight pantaloons as he ran.

"Dear—dear me! S'posin' he's mad? Gosh all hemlock, what will I do?" screamed Nicodemus.

"Let the next dog go by without a kick, I reckon!" suggested a truckman, who had seen the whole affair. "The dog isn't mad now, but if he swallows what he has in his mouth, he'll be apt to die! Ha! ha!"

"What do you mean, sir—are you laughing at me, sir?" cried Sparkle, dancing up and down in mingled pain and anger.

"No—I was laughing at the dog!"

"Gosh all hemlock, sir—if you had laughed at me, sir—I'd—l'd—"

He did not like the man's look, so he stopped right there.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED GAUNTLET.

THE merchant, with Harry by his side, and Long Tom Breeze striding along in the rear, walked rapidly till he reached his house on Calvert street—a brick mansion without ornament, plain, but large and roomy in appearance.

At the door he was met by a lovely girl yet in her teens, whose dark eyes flashed with joy as she cried out:

"We were waiting for you, papa—mamma and I—you are ten minutes late!"

She did not see until she had spoken that Mr. Brent was not alone. So her face was all aglow with blushes when her eyes fell on Harry and his tall companion, and the merchant said:

"No matter, my dear. To make amends I've brought home a cousin for you, Master Harry Brent, with a sailor friend of his, good Tom Breeze. You've heard me speak of my brother, Captain Brent, of the navy. This is his son, and, Harry, this is Lucille Brent, my adopted daughter!"

"I'm glad to see you, cousin Harry," she said, shyly, as she extended her hand to the young man. "And you, too, Mr. Tom Breeze!" she added, casting a glance at his tall form.

"Come in all; you'll find your aunt in the parlor, Harry!" cried the merchant.

Mrs. Brent, a matron of noble presence, had never met her nephew till then, but she greeted him warmly, and then all, at once, adjourned to the dining-room.

Tom Breeze tried to back out, saying he was not used to dining with gentlefolk, but the merchant hushed him at once, saying that the man who had saved his nephew's life was fit to dine with an emperor, and while he staid on shore he should share the best he had to offer.

Tom was a little awkward, at first, but no one seemed to notice it, for true politeness ruled that board, and soon making good use of his eyes he managed to do as the rest did, and before dinner was over felt as much at home as he would have done in a fo'castle mess.

Though Harry talked mostly with Mr. Brent and his aunt, he could hardly keep his eyes from his adopted cousin.

She was very beautiful. A bright brunette, eyes and hair black as jet, a form just budding into perfect womanhood, intelligent and winning in expression—a strong contrast to his eyes of blue, his light-brown hair and fair complexion, she was a lovely revelation to his eyes.

For, kept by a strict and stern parent to close study and constant duty, the boy had never been thrown in contact with the fair sex, and till now had hardly realized that there was anything pretty outside of a ship under full sail in a slashing breeze on a foam-tipped-sea.

That she had eyes for him, he saw, too, for more than once their glances met, and both blushed, scarce knowing why.

After dinner Mr. Brent refused to go to the parlor, as his wife desired, saying he wished to show his nephew the new schooner, "RED GAUNTLET," which he was fitting for a voyage to the East Indies. And he also wanted the opinion of so old a sailor as Tom Breeze, who, as boy and man, had been upon the ocean over five-and-thirty years.

So they were to wait until nightfall for further acquaintance in the parlor, for it was a busy time, and Mr. Brent kept early and late hours at his stores and counting-room.

A brisk walk of half an hour took Mr. Brent, Harry and Long Tom to the private ship-yard and dock belonging to the merchant.

"There she is! I know that is the craft you mean. Oh, what a beauty!"

These words broke from the lips of Harry Brent, as, from among seven or eight vessels, ships, brigs and barques, he pointed to a large foretop-sail schooner, sharp-hulled, with raking masts—a model for speed evidently, with depth of hold as well as beam that would enable her to stand up stiffly under the great spread of canvas which her heavy spars could carry.

"You are right," admitted the pleased merchant. "That is the Red Gauntlet, three hundred tons measurement, though at a first glance no one would think her more than half that. Her decks, as you see, are flush fore and aft, with cabin below and plenty of room forward for a crew of fifty men—ports for six carronades of a side and two circles, one aft and one over the fore-castle, for pivot-guns—Long Toms, friend Breeze, and I've got the guns, too, up in the warehouse—brass thirty-twos for pivot, and iron twenty-fours for broadside."

"Just the thing! Oh, uncle, if I had her, and we were at war with England, I'd sweep the ocean from here to Dover Cliffs! I'd make your fortune and mine—I'd do it, or die on her decks!"

"My dear boy, there is no war yet. But I shall arm her all the same, and she'll load with a light but valuable cargo for an East Indian port just as soon as I can get her off, while her copper is bright and her keel smooth."

"And, if I do not change my mind, which I seldom do, her captain will be Harry Brent."

"Oh, uncle! you overwhelm me with kindness. But you shall never regret it. And Tom Breeze, here—"

"Shall be her gunner and your best man, if you ever have to bring her to action, as no doubt you will, for the East Indian seas swarm with pirates. The voyage has great risks, but the profits are worth all the risks. One successful voyage will thrice pay the cost of the craft, expensive as she is in build and outfit."

"Tom, the blessing of the Almighty is on you and me," cried the happy boy. "Who would have dreamed of such a chance as this?"

"No one, Master Harry. I'm all choked up, and can't talk—but just wait till I'm on that deck doin' duty once more—I'll work for all that's in me!"

"I know you will, my brave man. But step on board, both of you; look her all over, below and aloft, and see if you can find anything to better. You mustn't wait to look for faults till you get to sea, where you can't mend 'em."

The schooner, with chafing-mats between her hull and the dock, lay fore and aft at the end of a pier not quite so wide as she was long, so they had a clear view of her sharp, flaring bow and round, clean-quartered stern.

Her beam, greatest just abreast the foremast, was not realized by either Harry or Tom until they stood on the deck.

Then, when they knew she drew sixteen feet at her load-line, they could see that her tonnage had not been overestimated by the merchant.

Now they could see what lengthy spars she carried, and how their rake would lift the sharp hull in a sea-way—imagine, too, with so much hold in the water, and that broad beam, how she could stand up under a press of canvas that few other models would dare to carry.

Tom and young Brent examined every spar, looked closely at the rigging, standing and loose, and the former pointed out where eye-bolts for preventer stays and blocks for extra braces would be an improvement, and the merchant at once noted down an order for the work.

The accommodations below for officers and men were plain and solid, but unusually comfortable. As Tom said—there was no gim-crack work about her, but no officer or man could ask for more room or handier quarters.

"We'll need small-arms as well as great guns, pikes to repel boarders and cutlasses for close quarters. Boarding nettings, too, for we might meet some of the rascally proas in Malay waters. I've seen them threaten even a man-o'-war," remarked Harry.

"Ah—have you been on Asiatic waters?" asked Mr. Brent.

"Yes, sir; my first cruise was to China and thence to Calcutta."

"So much the better then for your first command in a merchantman. We will now inspect the magazine. I have ordered extra pains taken there."

The merchant went into the after cabin, and opening a trap-door in the deck—there are no floors known aboard ship—he descended into the after hold. The magazine was a large room made of heavy copper, with double doors of the same material. Not a bolt or plate of iron could be seen.

There were compartments for filled cartridges for the twenty-four-pound carronades; also for the heavier charges for the long guns, each numbered plainly. Also copper cases for boat service, swivel cartridges—everything as complete as could be found in a perfect man-o'-war. Leathern-covered buckets to carry powder in to the guns were suspended overhead.

The shot-lockers were forward, in a place built expressly for that purpose.

"How does gunner Tom like the arrangement for his department?" asked the merchant.

"They're A 1; first-class, sir," responded the delighted old seaman. "And if the guns are as good in proportion, they'll sing a lively tune when they're put to work."

"You shall see them and the rest of the arms when we get back to the stores," said Mr. Brent.

"To-morrow we will have the sails bent, and

see how they look on the spars," he added, when they went on deck. "I shall have the schooner fitted out in full and loaded at this dock, out of the way of British spies, for I keep sharp watchmen in my private yard, who allow no intrusive strangers about."

"Why do you have the craft painted red, sir?" asked the midshipman.

"It was a fancy in Lucille. The foolish girl had just read a story called Red Gauntlet, and when I asked her to name this craft at the launch, nothing else would do but that. And to carry out the idea, red—vermillion red—was the color decided on."

"Then I shall like it," murmured the young man, musingly.

He was thinking then of ruby lips and rosy cheeks most likely.

"We will now go to the stores," said the merchant. "My clerks will wonder at my long absence."

Just as they were about to leave the yard, a man dashed up to the gate on a horse covered with foam and trembling with fatigue.

"Dispatches from the United States Secretary of State, sir—to be delivered only to Mr. Carroll Brent!" announced the rider.

"I am he! You have come fast!" observed the merchant, extending his hand for the sealed package.

"Forty miles in three hours and a half, sir—with only one change!" was the reply, as the man leaped to the ground to ease his exhausted animal.

"The news is glorious, Harry—GLORIOUS!" cried the merchant, as he tore open the large official envelope with a tremulous hand. "But—it is a state secret yet. You shall be at sea inside of ten days!"

CHAPTER V.

A STOUT SHIP AND A LOYAL CREW.

"A STATE secret, for the present; you will know it before you sail!" explained Carroll Brent to his nephew. Then he turned to the Government messenger, handed him a handsome present in gold as he said:

"Take your horse to my stable, No. — Calvert street, and my groom will care for him. Take this card to my wife and she will see to your personal comfort. This evening I will prepare an answer to the letter of the Secretary of State, ready for you to carry back in the morning."

The messenger bowed low, thanked the liberal merchant, and humanely led the tired horse to its quarters.

Mr. Brent now hastened to his counting-room, accompanied by his nephew and Tom Breeze.

In front, Nicodemus Sparkle was still attending to his out-door duties, checking off bills of goods as sent away, but his face had no sparkle in it now, and he limped painfully around, with a handkerchief bound around his leg.

"What is the matter, sir—how did you get hurt?" asked the merchant, kindly.

"I went to kick a dog off the pavement, sir, and he bit me—took a piece right out of my leg, sir!"

"Poor fellow! Did it kill the dog?" and his employer passed on.

"Gosh all hemlock! I wonder which he meant, me or the dog, when he said poor fellow?" muttered Sparkle.

The merchant went into his counting-room and gave several orders to his clerks; then turned to his nephew and Breeze.

"We will now go and inspect the arms I told you of."

Taking down a key he led the way to a large room on the ground floor of the next store. There, with carriages and tackle complete, were long brass thirty-two-pounders, twenty-four pound carronades of iron, and several swivel guns which could be used in boats or on the bulwarks fitted for their reception.

In arm-chests, which the ship-owner opened for inspection, were muskets, pistols and cutlasses.

In one corner of the room stout boarding-pikes, such as were then used on all men-of-war, were stored in large numbers.

Harry Brent and Tom Breeze examined all these with critical care.

"With good ammunition and plenty of it, you can make the Red Gauntlet invincible, with a good crew aboard!" declared Harry, when they had looked the arsenal over.

"To the last we will all three give our personal attention to-morrow," replied the merchant.

"I shall have my head-clerk select the cargo I intend to send out, and we will all do the rest of the work so as to get the craft ready for sea as speedily as it can be done and well done. For no mistakes must be made. To you and Tom alone, depending on your honor, I will confide the secret of my dispatches."

"It is known at Washington that war must soon be declared. A demand made on Great Britain for redress of recent wrongs has been met with contempt. Every preparation is being secretly and quietly made to meet the crisis."

"I now hold the commission, a Letter of Marque, making the Red Gauntlet a legalized

privateer the moment war is known to exist between the two nations.

"So no matter where you are when war is declared, you will be ready to act. When you go to sea your name will fill a blank space left in the commission, and nothing will be left undone to make your craft fit for the work before her."

"Oh, how I long to be at sea with all my chances before me!" exclaimed the young officer. "My father shall hear from me, if we never meet!"

Mr. Brent now returned to his counting-room and devoted a short time to business. Then leaving his head-clerk to close up and see the night-watchman posted, he started for home in company with his new protégés.

After tea Lucille gave her father and guests some delightful music, and made the evening so agreeable to the young deserter that the hours passed uncounted.

It was midnight when he retired, too full of bright dreams of the future to sleep.

Long Tom Breeze for a week was busied in superintending the complete armament of the schooner and in getting everything in his future department into its place.

And Mr. Carroll Brent in person, aided by experienced clerks, selected the cargo he intended sending abroad, and had it loaded in and stowed by his own regular stevedores.

Extra sails—an entire suit, and duplicate light spars were also fitted and stored on board.

Harry Brent, aided by the best shipping-master in Baltimore and agents sent to Philadelphia and Washington, was engaged in getting a picked crew.

At the end of a week he had fifty men before the mast—not one under twenty nor one over forty years of age, except good Tom Breeze, who lacked but a year of being fifty. He had two mates—all he asked for, a sail-master, carpenter and boatswain.

Best of all, every man was an experienced sailor and all American born—calculated to be true to the flag of their native land.

His first-mate was a Down-Easter, a "Kennebunk boy," he said, though he was close to forty in years. He had fire in his eye and was nervous in action, though quaint and slow in speech. His name was Seth Coffin.

The second mate, Josh Nettles, was from Salem—thirty years old and "smart as a steel-trap"—especially in the jaws. The man who skulked in his watch would catch it, hot and heavy!

Both mates had seen service before the mast in the navy while boys, and both had been to the East Indies several times.

When the Red Gauntlet lay off her wharf at moorings and this crew was mustered aft to hear a few words from the owner, Mr. Brent said to his nephew that he had never in all his experience seen a crew of that number of men of such a mold.

Sober, sharp and ready, they looked every man equal to any two of the usual class shipped on a merchantman.

"Men," remarked the ship-owner, "I never sent a better vessel to sea than this on which we now stand. She is fitted out as well as money and good judgment can do it. And—officers and crew—I do not think a better manned craft of her size is now afloat. You have a young captain, but he has been on board a man-o'-war since he was a child, learning his duty from the best teachers in the world.

"I trust a fortune in his hands and yours. I know I will not be disappointed."

"Three cheers for the owner!" cried Mr. Nettles, the second mate.

They came, three times three.

"The supercargo, who will aid the captain in performing the mercantile part of his duty, will be here to-day from New York, and then you can look for blue water, and I hope for a quick and prosperous voyage. You are going into dangerous seas, but you are well armed, and I have no fears but you'll pull through every peril successfully. That is all."

"Boatswain—you can pipe down," added the young captain. "I have no speeches to make. Deeds, not words, is my motto!"

"Hold on a moment, all!" cried a voice, clear as a bugle note, and over the side from a shore-boat rowed by Nicodemus Sparkle, who had been impressed for the occasion, sprung Lucille, the owner's beautiful daughter.

"I have brought a gift—a set of colors, sir—which I know will never be dishonored!" and she unrolled a large bundle containing three flags.

One was the Stars and Stripes, such as then floated from the flag-staff aft, and would float from the gaff when it was hoisted.

Next was a burgee, on which, embroidered by her own deft needle, was an arm and hand incased in a red gauntlet holding a sword uplifted. This was for the main truck.

For the fore a blue burgee, with the name of Carroll Brent, the owner, in white letters.

"Bend the new colors to the halliards!" commanded Harry Brent, with face glowing with pleasure.

This was done.

"Hoist away, and let us have nine cheers for

the giver—the noblest little woman in all America!"

Cheer upon cheer rent the air as the new colors fluttered to the breeze.

"Miss Lucille—we all as men pledge ourselves to hold your gift free from all shame in storm or sunshine, in peace or war, as long as a thread shall last of the material you have prepared!"

"Ay, ay, that we will!" cried every man in unison.

"Gosh all hemlock! I wish I was a sailor!" exclaimed Nicodemus Sparkle, carried away by the excitement of the moment.

"You'll have to be a man first!" remarked Lucille, in a low tone, intended only for his own ear, but both remarks had been overheard by Harry, who smiled at the significant proviso.

Nicodemus was squelched—he said no more; but went back into his boat and waited orders there.

They came too soon for his comfort. The poor fellow thought Lucille was a little better than an angel from above. Her voice went like an icy chill to his heart when she came to the side and called out:

"You can go back to the store, Mr. Sparkle. I shall go ashore in the captain's boat with him and my father!"

"Gosh all hemlock! Just my luck!" moaned Mr. Sparkle. "I'd made up something real nice to say, goin' back—some poetry, but now—my cake is all dough that never will be baked!"

And he pulled off as spitefully as if he was after another dog to kick.

On his way he was nearly run into by another boat, which, with two stalwart oarsmen in it, was heading for the schooner.

In the stern-sheets, standing erect, was a tall, slender man, with a huge gray mustache, which, twisted up in a ferocious curl, literally reached from ear to ear.

This man was twirling his cane, as if it was a rapier, from side to side, making a lunge now and then as if to spit an opponent, while he urged the oarsmen on.

His words and accent told his nationality.

"*Tout suite!* Pull fast, mes braves—pull fast for ze dollare zat I give! Zey wait for me—ze supercargo—zey look for ze Chevalier Duval!"

"That's the supercargo—old Duval! He's sweet on Miss Lucille, too!" muttered Sparkle, as he dashed his hand over his face to wipe away a splash of water one of the other oars sent over him. "Gosh all hemlock—everybody is sweet on her, but me. I don't see what I'm made for! I work like a dog and try to get ahead, but it's the same old thing year in and year out. Sparkle go and Sparkle come—that's all. Will I ever be an Esquire?"

CHAPTER VI. AGAIN AFLOAT.

"THERE he comes! There is the Chevalier Duval, your supercargo, Harry!" cried Mr. Brent, pointing to the approaching boat. "I select him because he speaks a dozen different languages, has been all over the world, and, being poor, he will be honest—being proud of his honor, he will be faithful. He is very eccentric, but you will like him when you come to know him."

The boat an instant later was alongside and the chevalier sprang on deck.

With courtly grace he saluted with his gold-headed cane, as if it were a sword; then bowing very low, cried out in a shrill voice:

"Monsieur Brent, I 'ave ze honare to report for duty, in accordance wiz your desire. Ah, ha, Ma'm'selle Lucille! so beautiful still! I kiss me your hands."

And he suited the words by his action.

"Chevalier, this is your young captain, my nephew, Harry Brent, late an officer in the navy, where his father commands a frigate. The rest of the officers and crew you will soon learn to know when at sea."

The chevalier bowed low.

"Monsieur Le Capitaine," he said, "I am proud to serve wiz you. I 'ave travel and voyage over ze great world all my life. I am ze soldiere, ze sailor, ze man of businasse."

"I speak in zeir own tongue wiz ze Chinees, ze Russe, ze Italian, ze Spaniard and ze German. Also ze Portuguese and Parsee of India. I know we shall be *très jolis amis!* I shall teach you and your men of ze rapier, ze lance and ze broadsword also."

"Very necessary accomplishments, my brave chevalier. But just now we have a great deal of business to go through with to get ready for leaving—much to be done, and that promptly; the bills of lading to overlook—the papers to be taken out of the Custom House and all that, for I want to get to sea by to-morrow, at the latest."

"*Eh bien!* I have no ozzare duty. I am for businasse at once—*tout suite!*—right away, mon capitaine and Monsieur Brent."

"Captin, d'ye see them mare's-tails a-skirtin' the sky east-board yonder? And, all above, a mackerel sky, like the feathers on a speckled hen?"

"We're goin' to have an easterly gale, fresh and heavy, inside of three or four hours, and 'most like 'twill last two days, at least, and to beat out o' Chesapeake Bay in face o' that,

would rack and strain new spars, hull and riggin' more than a hurricane will six months from now when all is settled down and stretched."

It was Seth Coffin who spoke in his slow, quaint way.

"I see the storm-signs," answered the captain, "and we will not get under way till the weather looks bright. It will give us more time to drill the men at the guns, arrange stations and get everything ship-shape."

"By the way, men, I have secured protection-papers from the collector for every man on board, and there shall be no impressment tricks played on you if an English man-of-war should try the game on us as they have on many American merchantmen."

"*A bas l'Angleterre!*" cried the chevalier. "Ze diable Anglais! I wish ze natione 'ave but one heart and I shall strike him so! Ah, ha!—carte—tierce! I pass him through and through!"

And the cane of the chevalier narrowly missed punching Seth Coffin in his broad chest, while the owner danced in front of an imaginary Englishman.

The storm-signs were sure, and the breeze came in sharp and fitful from the east before Harry Brent was ready to take his uncle, Lucille and the chevalier on shore.

Harry ordered a second anchor let go before he left, and told his officers to drill the men at the batteries and get them used to the working of the guns while they had leisure.

Then he went on shore with his uncle, the chevalier and Lucille.

For two days, as Seth Coffin had predicted, the gale from the northeast continued, and this, while it prevented the Red Gauntlet from commencing her voyage, gave her youthful commander every chance to complete his preparations for going to sea well-fitted for every emergency.

As a merchantman, his craft was very strong-handed. She could have been worked at sea with half the crew; but if she ever had to go into action, with twelve carronade and two pivot guns to work, and sails to trim and tend while in action, she was short-handed.

But, Harry Brent, aided by his officers, in making out his station-book, did the best he could to place every man where his work would tell. With a steward, two cooks, the forward officers, his two mates and the chevalier, he had just sixty-one men on board, and not a man of them all, useless.

On the morning of the third day, after the colors which Lucille Brent had presented were hoisted, firing a single parting gun, the voyage was commenced.

The Red Gauntlet, with an assorted cargo, cleared for Singapore and a market, stood down the Bay under all the sail she could spread to a light breeze from the westward.

And Harry Brent, proud and happy, trod the deck as master!

That day, going down the bay, he had the crew called to quarters, and telling them as a reason for his action, that war with England was imminent, and that none knew how soon they might have to fight to escape capture, he put them through a thorough course of exercise both at the great guns and with small-arms.

So well did the men perform their various duties that it gave him confidence in them, and they were satisfied also that they could fight their ship as well as sail her if need came.

And the danger was far nearer than any of them imagined.

Having got a good idea of the speed of his vessel, by passing numerous fast oyster-sloops as if they were standing still, though on the same course, and leaving a large revenue cutter hull down within four hours after they passed her, Harry Brent began to feel very proud of his new command.

At night, though the wind had died away almost to a calm, he was near the mouth of the bay: the lights of Cape Charles and Cape Henry visible on either bow, and the long roll of the ocean swell heaving in had lulled him to sleep.

Leaving orders to be called if the breeze freshened, so he could give the course when the pilot left the schooner, Harry Brent turned in to rest—tired with a day of constant excitement.

It was daylight when he was called. A light wind just filled the sails, coming from the north, but it looked like freshening to the windward.

The steward brought the young captain and the first officer who had the watch each a cup of hot coffee from the galley—a custom seldom forgotten on any well-officered ship at sea.

"What is there in sight, Mr. Coffin?" asked the boy commander, as he glanced right and left over the tumbling, choppy sea which told they were not yet off soundings.

"Nothin' more'n oyster-sloops or coasters, captin, except one square-rigger, nearly hull-down ahead," answered the officer. "I squinted at her through the glass a minute or two ago. She seems heavy-sparred for a merchant craft, but she's too far off to make out yet."

"Standing in or off-shore, sir?"

"In, I think, if she has the same wind we have."

"Then we will soon know what she is. Where is the pilot?"

"For'ard, there, by the knightheads, sir—looking out for his boat. He's a-squintin' at the square-rigger, too, I see."

The captain walked forward where the pilot, with the spy-glass in his hand, was standing.

"Do you see your boat, pilot?" asked Harry.

"Yes, captain; she is a little off our lee bow, heading up for us. You can see 'No. 7' on her sail with the naked eye."

"But I was lookin' at that craft standin' in this way from the outside, thinkin' she may need a pilot. She's a man-o'-war, if my old eyes are good for anything."

"Let me have the glass a moment, please."

The pilot handed it over, and young Brent sprung up into the fore-rigging ten or twelve ratlines high.

"You were right; she is a single-decker—a sloop-of-war, I reckon. But she don't look American to me; her masts are short and stumpy."

"I hope she isn't English, for *your* sake, sir," said the pilot. "The last ship I run out of Baltimore had twelve men taken out of her before I was discharged and paid off."

"A British frigate took 'em, claimed them as British subjects, and every man swore he was an American, too! It was a shame—but the merchant captain couldn't help himself. *They* were armed and had the force—he had not."

"No man shall be taken from *my* crew!" declared Brent, firmly. "This rascally claim has been carried out too long. If a British officer gets on board my craft he'll be civil, or he'll go overboard, arms or no arms!"

An hour later all hands had breakfasted on the Red Gauntlet. The pilot had been discharged also, for the vessel was on the bar and heading out for blue water. Her colors were all set, the beautiful Stripes and Stars fluttering from the main gaff.

"Tom, have your guns all cast loose, your arm-chests unlocked and small-arms ready loaded and handy. We may have use for them by and by."

This order was given in a low tone to Gunner Tom Breeze by his young captain, who also added:

"Do your work quietly and attract no notice. The danger I apprehend may blow over."

Tom, with three quarter gunners, at once started to obey orders.

Seth Coffin and the second mate were both eying the approaching ship anxiously.

She was now not more than three miles off, showed a full tier of guns to the broadside, had a black and dirty look, but, as she was coming down square before the wind, her colors could not be seen.

"She's English! I'll bet a hunk o' ginger-bread ag'in' a cent o' that," growled Coffin.

"*A bas l' Anglais!* I shall myself prepare!" cried the Chevalier Duval, who had been striding nervously to and fro on the quarter-deck. And he hurried down into the cabin.

"I wish we had more wind! She carries twenty-four heavy guns and her decks seem full of men. Ah—there she comes by the wind, and—you were right, Mr. Coffin, the red cross of St. George floats at her gaff. Call all hands to stations, quietly, ready for action, but we'll show no arms yet!"

"Yet? You wouldn't dare to fight *her*? By the way she works, she must carry two hundred men at least!" cried Seth Coffin.

The ship had luffed suddenly up, taking in studding-sails on both sides at once, and now lay fairly across the course of the schooner, with her main yards thrown aback.

"Bear away a point; we will cross her stern!" ordered young Brent, coolly, to the helmsman.

The crew at their stations watched that young face eagerly. They could not see a sign of fear in it. The stern resolution of a man was read in that smooth, boyish countenance.

On, steady, but not so fast as he wished, for the wind was yet light, the schooner held her way. She was almost under the stern of the Englishman, when a bluff-looking, red-faced officer in uniform hailed through a trumpet:

"Schooner ahoy! why don't you shorten sail and heave to? Can't you see I want to speak you?"

"*Speak away!* We're not deaf, but we're in a hurry!" shouted Harry, not needing a trumpet, his voice loud and clear as a bugle-note.

"Heave to! I want to send a boat on board! Heave to, or I'll fire into you, you lubber!"

"Fire on *that* flag at your peril!" cried Harry, pointing to the starry flag above his head.

"This is an armed vessel and I am an officer of the United States Navy!"

His ringing reply must have been heard plainly, for there seemed to be some indecision on board the Englishman, and the schooner swept proudly on, without starting tack or sheet.

The Englishman could see her crew standing to their guns, but no man-of-war pennant flew at her mast-head—the Red Gauntlet burgee only floated there.

"*Mon brave capitaine!* you have make ze miserable John Bull afraid!" cried the Chevalier Duval, fairly dancing with joy.

He had just come on deck, with a long rapier belted to his side and a brace of elegant dueling pistols in his belt.

Not until they were past and a cable's-length away did young Brent see that two boats, with armed crews, had been lowered from the far side of the sloop-of-war, and he was a half a mile distant or more when those boats were hoisted up, and the ship, filling away, sent a shot close to the schooner on the lee side.

"A very plain signal to heave to, but I shall not do it. Thank Heaven, the breeze freshens a little!" cried Harry. "Luff three points, so every sail draws! Tom Breeze, put a chain-shot into the after pivot gun!"

"Great Jerusalem, capting! If she fires a broadside, she'll sink us!" cried Seth Coffin, really alarmed.

"Then we'll go down with colors flying, sir! She has got to *hit* us before she can sink us! See *that*!"

A second shot, evidently aimed to hit the schooner, struck the water full a hundred yards astern. She was sliding through the water wonderfully fast now.

A minute later the sloop-of-war, now over a mile astern, luffed and fired a whole broadside. The water was as white as snow about half a cable's length astern of the Red Gauntlet; the schooner had shot clear of range.

"Tom, cut away at the infernal fool! Show him we can talk back when we're forced to it!" cried young Brent.

Tom Breeze had already sighted the gun, and with good judgment, too, for at the shot the foretopmast of the Englishman came toppling over her bows, and, as he filled away, the main came, too, at a second shot.

"Put another right in the eyes of her!" cried Harry Brent, as Tom hurried to reload his "stern-chaser."

And it was done, while the Englishman, in confusion, fired another scattering broadside. Not a shot came near this time. The Red Gauntlet was safe, out of range and gaining every second.

Cheer after cheer rose from the delighted crew. Chevalier Duval cried for joy:

"Zat last shot make ze John Bull man seek—very seek!" he shouted.

"Capting, I never was worse skeered in my life, and I'm sorry for it now. I didn't know you so well then as I do now, and you see I've been in British clutches once, and I thought I'd get there this time, or else go to Davy Jones's locker, without even a chance to say 'Now I lay me' afore I went under."

"It is all right, Mr. Coffin. I don't blame you for being alarmed. We *were* in a tight place. If I had hove to under his guns, he might have taken half this brave crew from us. I swore in my heart he should not, and thanks be to Providence, we are safe."

Cheer on cheer rose, for, as the breeze freshened, the beautiful schooner fairly flew over the water, like a sea-bird.

"One word more, men, before we pipe down and call the watch," cried the young captain.

"I told that Englishman only the truth when I said I was an officer in the United States Navy. I have the parchment here to prove it."

He drew out his midshipman's warrant and held it up.

"And now," he continued, "that you are at sea in the fastest and best-armed vessel of her size afloat, I can tell you more:

"I hold here, to use the moment we know war exists between Great Britain and the United States, a *commission* making this vessel a *privateer*! Let the war come, and I'll fill your pockets with prize-money and make the name of the Red Gauntlet a terror wherever the English flag is flaunted!"

Again the men cheered, for, young as their captain was, they saw that he was both cool and wise and brave—worthy to command them there or anywhere.

Before the call was heard for dinner, though the Englishman had made all the sail he could in chase, he was hull down and almost out of sight.

When Seth Coffin, with his watch below, went down to dinner in the cabin with the captain and the chevalier, his face yet wore a look of shame and mortification.

"Capting, do you *think* I'm a d'rotted coward for what I did and said to-day? I never felt so pesky mean in my life, as I do now—by gracious goodness!"

"Do not feel worried, Mr. Coffin. If I did not trust you as a good seaman and a man of courage, I'd tell you so at once. You'll have plenty of chances to redeem yourself before us all, if I'm not a poor prophet, before our voyage ends. Take it easy, sir, and wait your chances, as I have had to do. I was called a coward, sir, by my own father—but he'll regret it yet, if he has not already!"

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD NEWS AHoy!

NICODEMUS SPARKLE was economical. Though paid a fair salary, he boarded at a cheap restaurant and lodged in a small attic room near the stores of his employer. His most expensive outlay was for clothing to make him look like an "Esquire" when not at his work.

In consequence of an early breakfast on coffee and cakes—a one shilling meal—and his vicinity

to the stores, he was always the first clerk there in the morning. Thus it was that he got hold of the *Baltimore Weekly* paper, yet wet from the press, that contained the following startling announcement:

"WAR IN EMBRYO! SHOTS EXCHANGED."

"Through the prompt attention of Pilot Sam Morris, of Boat No. 7, we have received the following startling news items:

"Just outside the capes, within the waters of the United States, the clipper schooner Red Gauntlet, belonging to our estimable citizen and most enterprising merchant, Carroll Brent, Esq., and commanded by his nephew, Midshipman Harry Brent, of the United States Navy, was hailed by the commander of H. B. Majesty's sloop-of-war Owl, twenty-four guns, and ordered to *heave to*.

"Young Brent refused to shorten sail, though within pistol-shot of the heavy batteries of the Briton, who had two armed boats lowered ready to commit the usual outrages of search and impressment, and when the captain of the Owl threatened to fire on him, told him, pointing to his flag, he would do so at his own peril."

"Before the Englishman could get over his astonishment at this unexpected defiance, and get his boats hoisted up out of the way of his batteries, the Red Gauntlet was off over half a mile distant, steering her course."

"Then, filling away in chase, the enraged Englishman fired a gun to windward of the schooner. It was unheeded by the gallant Brent, though his men were seen to spring to their stations and clear ship for action. By the way, the Red Gauntlet is heavily armed to be able to repel pirates in the Asiatic seas, whither she is bound."

"The sloop-of-war now sent two successive shots directly at the schooner, narrowly missing the mark. The Red Gauntlet, hauling up so every sail drew, still swiftly forged ahead. She was nearly a mile distant when the sloop-of-war luffed up and fired an entire broadside, intending, no doubt, to sink the schooner."

"Splendidly sailed, the brave Brent held his vessel just ahead of the shower of cannon-balls that fairly whitened the sea under his stern."

"But he had borne all the insult with intended injury that his patience could endure. He now fired a retaliatory compliment."

"From his after pivot gun, a long thirty-two, he sent back a chain-shot which cut the fore and main topmast, with all their sails, out of the sloop-of-war. A second shot struck a gun in the bow-port of the Owl and killed and wounded over a dozen men."

"This was enough. The Englishman rounded to, to repair damages, and the glorious Red Gauntlet proceeded on her voyage without further molestation."

"All honor to this young hero who has been the first to openly resist the 'Right of Search and Impressment.' Should his act be considered by the British Minister at Washington a *casus belli*, the nation will rejoice. For, as things have gone of late, our commerce is being ruined, our ships robbed of their crews, our flag exposed to continued insult and wrong."

"The Owl lies off the capes, waiting for new spars that her captain sent in to purchase and to hear from the British Minister at Washington, to whom he has reported what he terms the '*outrage*,' by a special messenger sent up in the pilot boat."

"Gosh all hemlock! Don't I wish I was in Harry Brent's place?" gasped Nicodemus, as he sat on the door-step, in front of the store, and read the whole article over aloud to the porter and the two watchmen who had just opened the front door.

The men smiled. That was all the wish was worth.

Just then Mr. Carroll Brent, unusually early for him, came down to the store.

"Sir—there's been awful work at sea! Gosh all hemlock, sir—it makes me shudder all over to think of it—the Red Gauntlet has been fired into by a British man-o'-war!"

He held the paper up, and Mr. Brent, without a word, took it and went inside.

He was there ten or fifteen minutes, and some of the other clerks had come to their day's duty when he came out again, with the paper in his hand.

"Mr. Sparkle," he said this time—it was usually "Here, you, Sparkle"—"be so kind as to take this paper up to my house and tell my wife and daughter I send them glorious news. My nephew is a hero, worthy of his name, indeed!"

"Mister Sparkle? Gosh all hemlock! I don't care a continental cent for the Esquire now!" gasped Nicodemus, as he hurried off on his errand. "Maybe Miss Lucille will be kind, too, and if she is—if she only gives me *one* sweet smile—I'll—I'll go to sea and be a hero myself! I wish I hadn't green eyes, a snub nose—carrot hair and little legs! Gosh all hemlock—I'll raise a mustache if it takes a pint of bear's grease!"

Ten minutes later, all breathless with haste, Nicodemus Sparkle stood before the door of the Brent mansion, thundering away with all his might on the old-fashioned brass knocker.

In a few seconds the door flew open, and Lucille Brent, lovely in a silk morning wrapper, stood before him with a frown instead of a smile on her fair face.

"Goose! do you want to break the door down and alarm the whole neighborhood?" she cried.

"What is the matter? Can't you *speak*?"

"Yes'm!" gasped poor Sparkle, almost stricken down with this unexpected reception; "Mr. Brent sent in this paper for you and the madam to read—that's all!"

She took the paper in and shut the door in his face.

"Gosh all hemlock! I wish I was *dead* and *buried*!" he moaned. "I was *Mister Sparkle* at the store—here I'm only a durned *goose*! I'll go and drown myself in—a pint o' beer."

And with downcast look and weary step he went slowly back to duty. He was an unfortunate—one of the kind:

"Who never had a piece of bread and butter
Particularly large and thick and wide—
But 'twould surely drop, and falling, fall
Always upon a dirty spot and buttered side."

The town by this time was full of excitement. The news spread as the paper was read, and "war" became the topic of the day.

Many people called to see Mr. Brent, and all who came congratulated him on the heroism of his nephew. All agreed to a man that he was right, and that the return fire was justifiable and honorable to him and his country.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEMMED IN BY A BRITISH FLEET—THE WAR-CLOUD IN SIGHT—PIRATES, TOO!

THE daring act of their young captain at the very outset of the voyage—his cool bravery and prompt reply to the British fire—made him literally the idol of his crew from that moment. No duty he exacted was too severe, and they soon became as perfect in drill as men-of-war's men would be at the end of a three years' cruise.

The Chevalier Duval had almost every day a willing class in sword and pike exercise, and gunner Tom Breeze could work the pivot-guns or batteries with an ease and celerity that satisfied him, old and tried as he was in service.

After they struck the regular trade winds they had little else to do but drill, for, day after day they laid their course with no occasion to take in or make sail, or rise tack or sheet.

As the standing rigging, shrouds and stays stretched out a pull was taken now and then to *taughten* it in. If a sail did not fit smooth, the bolt-ropes were shortened in. Nothing was left undone to keep the pretty schooner in perfect sailing trim.

Once only, in almost three months, they were in real peril. When night closed in not a sail was in sight. When day dawned they were almost surrounded by a British fleet of men-of-war—a squadron lately relieved from the South American station.

Harry Brent had plenty of bunting on board, and having been signal officer on his father's ship, took it into his head to have a complete set of signal flags made, such as were used in the navy to convey news, orders, etc.

This done, the idea struck him to have a man-of-war pennant made that he might, if ever necessity called for it, masquerade as a United States ship-of-war, and thus gain an amount of respect which a mere merchantman could not expect.

And that morning the time came. The moment he saw he could not avoid being spoken by some of the men-of-war which literally hemmed him in, he hoisted his ensign at the gaff, his man-of-war streamer at the main, and was careful to show no private signals.

He ran his guns out, mustered his full crew on deck, trimmed his old uniform with gold straps on the shoulder and had the Chevalier Duval on deck, as an officer in gorgeous uniform—one the old fellow had worn in his earlier career.

"What vessel is that?" asked the first officer who hailed him—a watch officer on a frigate, whose stern he crossed just after the dawn of day.

"The United States schooner *Enterprise*, bound to Asiatic seas with dispatches to our squadron," was the answer.

"What news in the States?"

"None very good. War expected with France!" responded Harry Brent, coolly.

"With France! That is news! We expected a tilt with you Yankees ourselves," returned the officer, who must have been a little sleepy.

"Where is your admiral?" asked Harry. "If you'll point his ship out I'll speak him and give him the latest news I have."

"Thankee! That's his ship away on the lee bow in the van. He is the two-decker, *Thunderbolt*!"

So Harry altered his course a little, as if he intended to speak the admiral, but really his only thought was to draw out of gunshot of all of the fleet without coming within hail of any more of them.

And he did it so quietly and neatly that he was out of range on a course that freed him from all attention before he was noticed by any other vessel besides the frigate first spoken.

Then he knew he was safe, for, with only a fair royal and lower-studding-sail breeze, he was logging ten knots, and he knew there was no tub in all that fleet which could mark more than seven or eight in such a wind.

This escape gave his officers and crew new heart, and they began to look on their young captain as a marvel.

No danger seemed to appall him; he was equal to every emergency.

Soon after this escapade they approached wa-

ters where the greatest danger of the voyage was to be apprehended.

Heading for the Straits of Sumatra, they were nearing the dreaded islands infested by Malay and Bornean pirates—seas swarming with fiends who lived only on the proceeds of rapine and violence—the pests of commerce and the terror of those too weak to resist them.

Navigation, too, with the imperfect charts of that day, was becoming dangerous, and having run out of the Trades, a constant watch for sudden squalls and course-baffling breezes had to be kept.

Harry Brent was on deck, day and night, except when he went below to take a meal or overhaul his charts when some new point of land was sighted.

This severe duty would have worn upon a less enthusiastic and buoyant nature, but the young commander stood it well—he would be the last to show, even if he felt, fatigue.

Every night they shortened sail, and took frequent soundings, and watches were kept on both bows, below and aloft, and the guns kept shot-tered and prepared for use at any moment.

Often, while passing the heavily-wooded islands, they would see large lateen-rigged proas darting in and out, and well they knew they were closely watched by those who would never lose the least chance of attack that opened favorably to them.

One night, when he estimated that six days more of fair sailing would carry him into Singapore, Brent had the schooner hove to, under her fore and aft sails. There were islands and reefs dangerously near, and he feared currents, whose drifts were uncertain.

All the watch was armed, the guns run out and primed ready for action. Wrapped in a boat-cloak Harry Brent lay down on the weather side of the quarter-deck for an hour's rest, just after midnight.

He had not slept an hour when he was aroused by Mr. Coffin with the startling remark:

"There's fightin' goin' on, capting, and not far off neither! Hear the big guns a-boomin', and you can see the flashes! They're not more than three or four miles away!"

Harry *did* hear them, and knew that hot work was going on from the sound.

"Call all hands to quarters, quietly!" he said. "We'll soon have light to see by, and know what is before us. Make all sail, too, so we'll be ready to move if there is occasion!"

Two hours later, Harry Brent was on the bulwark, spy-glass in hand. Suddenly a shout broke from his lips:

"It is the War-Cloud, my father's frigate, ashore on a reef and beset by pirates! Clear ship for action and fill away! Now he shall see if Harry Brent is a coward!"

In a minute the Red Gauntlet was plunging forward to take part in the battle.

CHAPTER IX.

NEITHER A DESERTER NOR COWARD NOW!

"'Tis a man-o'-war, sure as fate!" cried Seth Coffin, who stood forward where he had a clear view. "High and dry on a reef, with the tide out and listed over so she can't use either broadside o' big guns, and there's a dozen or more big proas a-peppering away at her, with a great gun in most of 'em. Jerusalem—but there's hot work ahead!"

"Double-shot every carronade—a stand of grape and a stand of canister in each!" cried Harry Brent, as he rushed aft. "Bring me up my signal bag, steward!"

In a minute he sent to the fore truck six flags, which read:

"We will engage the enemy and assist you!"

"Clear away your pivot-gun forward, Tom Breeze!" he shouted next. "Send a couple of chain-shot right through that bunch of proas to windward of the frigate, then stand by the starboard broadside guns and give it to 'em as I sweep past to port! Then be ready when I tack and come back, to give 'em thunder and lightning from the larboard guns!"

The schooner was now rushing through the water, though a mile away from the scene of action yet. That her signal was seen and understood, Harry knew; a moment after Tom Breeze sent the chain-shot flying through the fleet of proas, knocking two of them all to pieces, as it seemed.

From a spar over the frigate flew five flags, which Harry read:

"We are overmatched—help needed!"

On—they swept, the men all at their stations, and five minutes only went by when the Red Gauntlet was at close quarters with the proas, and then the gunners, as each carronade bore on an enemy, poured in the terrible double charge.

Harry Brent, firm as a rock on the quarter-deck, as they shot by, shouted:

"Courage! COURAGE, old War-Clouds—we'll save you yet!"

He evidently was recognized, for cheer on cheer rose from all over the frigate's deck.

There was no chance amid the thunder of the guns, the yells of the pirates, and the firing of small-arms, for words to be heard, and now, as the schooner shot ahead of the proas, Harry

coolly threw her up fairly athwart their line and raked them with his larboard battery.

The effect on them was terrible. Many of the proas were shattered and sunk on the spot, and the crew of the frigate, using small-arms where they could not bring a cannon to bear, killed the struggling wretches by scores in the water.

Every proa but four was now disabled, and these under sail and oars tried to get away as fast as they could. But the blood of Harry Brent was all afire now, and he shouted to Tom Breeze:

"Give 'em chain shot, Tom—they mustn't get away!"

And the gunners showed their long training by their splendid work now. Though the Malays fired a few shots in return, wounding three of the schooner's men, Harry soon saw the last proa shattered and sinking, less than a mile away.

It was a victory, full and complete, and as he filled the schooner away on the other tack, and ran within hail of the frigate, Harry, who saw his father standing on the poop-deck, beside Mr. Neville, shouted:

"Captain Harry Brent, though termed a *coward*, is very proud to be able to help Post-Captain Brent, of the navy, in his time of need!"

"My son! My *brave* son! Come on board and let me thank you!" shouted his father.

"I have not time, sir, now; we'll meet again! I see you have more assistance coming!"

And the young hero pointed to two American men-of-war, a sloop and a brig, crowding all sail and bearing down toward the crippled flagship.

"Aren't you goin' to stay and make up with the old man, Master Harry?" asked Tom Breeze, in a low tone, as he came aft when the order was given to resume the schooner's old course.

"Not yet, Tom. He may need our help again. He hasn't seen half what we *can* do. Wait till we have *men* to fight, not a parcel of half naked savages! And, besides, I expect you and me are logged as *deserters* on the frigate's books!"

"If they keep *that* there, after what we've done for 'em, sir, there's no gratitude in the world!" averred Tom, half vengefully, and he went forward to see to his guns.

If both could have heard what passed between Harry's father and Lieutenant Neville, at that very moment, they would have been more than satisfied.

There were tears in old Captain Brent's eyes, as he said in a low tone:

"Neville, my friend, I shall never forgive myself for the injustice I have done my brave boy. But for him and the guns so well worked by old Tom Breeze and his crew, where would we be now? We were literally overwhelmed with numbers; we couldn't bring a gun to bear on them laying over on our bilge as we are, and they were tearing us to pieces with their long guns!"

"It is true, sir! One-third of our crew are dead or wounded. The second lieutenant is mortally hurt, the surgeon says, and several other officers were hit!"

"It is a sad affair, sir. Our getting aground was the cause of it all, and that was owing to that squall, yesterday afternoon. But the Grampus and Boston are close aboard. We'll get out guns and ballast and get off as soon as we can, with their assistance!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And, Mr. Neville, overhaul our log, and where my son and Tom Breeze are entered as '*deserters*,' erase the word and mark down '*absent on the captain's authority*.'"

"Ay, ay, sir! I will gladly make the change. Have you an idea what your son is commanding?"

"Yes, sir—it is an armed trader belonging to my brother, Carroll Brent, of Baltimore. I saw his name on a burgee at the main-truck!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SIGNAL AT LAST!

A FEW holes in her sails, a half-dozen marks on her bulwarks, and three men so slightly wounded that the Chevalier Duval, who had a good deal of surgical skill, soon dressed the wounds and reported the men not unfit for duty, was all the damage the Red Gauntlet got in the dashing attack made on the pirates.

This could be accounted for only by the fact that the Malays were taken completely by surprise, and were so panic-stricken that they sought only to escape, not thinking of fighting an enemy that seemed almost to have dropped from the clouds. Having, as they believed, the frigate in an almost helpless condition, they had counted on an easy victory when death and destruction came upon them almost as swift as a thunderbolt from the sky.

The rest of the voyage was without any incident of note. On the evening of the fifth day from that of the engagement, the schooner lay at anchor in the roads of Singapore in company with a vast fleet of merchantmen and some half-dozen men-of-war of different nations. One English brig and an American corvette were among the last.

As soon as he anchored and unfurled sails after receiving a visit from the captain of the port, young Brent, accompanied by the Cheva-

lier Duval, went on shore to communicate with the merchants to whom he had letters of introduction and advice.

He found the market in splendid condition to receive his cargo. The rumors of impending war, which would cut off supplies, and close commercial avenues, had run prices of imports up to a fabulous degree. And as insurance had greatly advanced, in view of war-risks, exports had run low. So, selling and buying for gold, Harry concluded with his supercargo that an immense profit would accrue to his owner if they took immediate advantage of the market.

Having made their negotiations on shore, Lascars were hired to lighten the cargo out as rapidly as possible, and a return cargo of spices, pepper and coffee secured.

For a time the young American, with his officers and crew, was too busy to devote any time to sight-seeing or pleasure on shore, and though Harry Brent met two or three officers from the American corvette whom he had known before, he had not exchanged visits with them.

He had, several times, when taking refreshments at the European Hotel, met some of the English officers belonging to the brig-of-war at the anchorage, but, with the exception of insulting looks and sneers indulged in by them—with safety, they thought, in a port held under their rule—nothing serious occurred until he was nearly ready to sail on his return voyage.

He had his cargo stored and had only to water ship and get a small supply of fruit and fresh provisions to be ready for sea.

He was dining in company with the chevalier at the Hotel d'Europa, with a lieutenant of the corvette at the same table, when a party of English naval officers, much the worse for the liquor they had indulged in, came in and took seats at a table near them. Mere sneers did not seem to satisfy these rum-soaked "gentry," this time.

One of them, a lieutenant, more boisterous than the rest, drank:

"Confusion to the Yankee nation, and a short rope and a high scaffold for their low-lived President, old Jimmy Madison."

The insult was so pointed that Harry Brent could not forego an answer.

Filling his glass, and asking his companions to do the same, Harry Brent rose to his feet and looking the English officer squarely in the face, raised his glass to his lips and cried:

"Here is perdition to King George, a libertine, sot and tyrant, and a speedy war with his coward followers!"

He half emptied his glass to the toast, and when the angry Englishmen sprung to their feet, the young American threw the remainder, glass and all, in the face of the officer who had begun the trouble.

In a second swords were drawn and for an instant a terrible affray seemed inevitable.

Harry was unarmed, but the chevalier and the American lieutenant both wore their swords, and though trebly outnumbered did not fall back a step, while Harry Brent, taking up the heavy oaken chair nearest him, threw himself forward, ready to take his own part until better armed.

The fury of the chevalier, as he threw himself into position with his long rapier, was so intense that, despite the peril, Harry had to laugh outright.

"Come on, you pauvre Anglais!—you misérables!" he cried. "We are no more than three, with two swords—you are nine or ten—come on and we will keel and eat you raw, you poor Bifsteaks!"

"Hold!" cried one of the oldest of the English officers. "Let this be a personal matter. One of us has received a deadly insult; let him at once meet and punish the insulter!"

"Precisely what I sought when I threw my wine-glass in his face, for insulting my country and my President, the contemptible scoundrel!" cried Harry Brent.

"Mon Dieu! I wish to fight *zem all*!" shouted the chevalier, dancing around with his long rapier *en garde*. "Cowards—every man!"

"Stop, chevalier; it is *my* quarrel first!" warned the young captain. "Lieutenant Morris, favor me by acting as one second; the chevalier can act as the other!"

This suited the English, for their lieutenant was considered the best swordsman on his ship, as well as a good shot, and had, on that account, taken the lead in framing the insult.

An adjournment to a shady grove near at hand was at once arranged, and swords, or rather, *cutlasses*—the real sword of a man-of-war's man—chosen as the weapons.

"Remember—my favorite feint, and cut off his right ear, at *ze first pas*!" advised the chevalier to Harry, when he placed him where the light would not trouble his eyes.

The Englishman had got pretty sober now, for his anger had killed the effect of the liquor he had drunk, and he opened the fight with a furious attack which kept Harry for some minutes busy in defense.

At last, when repeated points and cuts had been coolly and skillfully parried by the young American, the latter, as if unintentionally, let his right leg slide so far in front that he appeared to have lost his balance.

Quick as thought, the Englishman brought his

cutlass down with a sweeping blow that might have severed the leg had it been where he expected to find it; but it was drawn back, quick as thought, and the weapon of Harry Brent, with a downward sweep, took off the *right ear* of his opponent, close to his head!

"Mark one!" cried Harry, with a taunting laugh.

"Bravo! How like you *zat*? Eh, Monsieur Bifsteak? Give him *anozzare, mon cher capitaine*!"

The Briton, wild with fury, now fought without caution, and in consequence Harry twice more touched him, once in the cheek and again in his sword-arm. His seconds saw that he was almost sure of defeat and urged him to make short work, or give it up.

"I'll die in my tracks before I give up to an infernal Yankee!" shouted the bleeding officer, making a furious attempt to beat down the guard of his lighter antagonist.

As he did *this*, striking with all his might at the guard which Harry purposely held square in front, the latter slipped aside and the sword of the Englishman came down on empty air.

It was another of the chevalier's famous feints, and the Frenchman fairly screamed with delight to see how well his young pupil remembered his lessons.

A second later, as the Englishman tried to turn on his agile foe who was playing all around him, his cutlass was thrown from his grasp and, he stood helpless—shedding tears of fury as he cried out:

"Kill me, you Yankee dog—kill me!"

"No, sir—I could have done that long ago, had I wished! An American will not strike or insult an *unarmed* man!" said Harry, contemptuously.

As he and his seconds turned to leave the ground, a platoon of native soldiers were seen approaching. They were too late.

In less than twenty minutes the Americans were all on board—the American lieutenant on his corvette, Harry and the chevalier on the decks of the Red Gauntlet.

The latter was now nearly ready for sea, and Mr. Coffin reported that only one boat-load of water was wanting to complete their preparations.

"There's something up, I'm a-thinkin', cap'tain!" was the first word he uttered, after Harry came off. "A fast-lookin' packet has just come in from toward the cape, under English colors, and before she anchored she ran alongside that English man-o'-war brig, and threw some papers to her. And in less than three minutes after there was a gun fired from the brig and a signal sent up for'ard. I think 'twas to recall all them ashore as belongs aboard, for you can see she's hove short and is loosing sail!"

"Yes, she is getting under way. I'd like to know what news she has received!"

An hour later Harry *did* know, through the confidence of his principal merchant on shore. He sent a note, marked private, and it came by the hand of a clerk who had no idea of its contents. This note read:

"Get away from the Roads as speedily as you can, or you will be captured at anchor. War has been declared by your President with Great Britain, and the news will bring the whole British fleet here inside of four-and-twenty hours, for they were cruising off Cape Romana but a day or two since."

Harry, wild with joy, hurried to tell the commander of the corvette the glad news, while the last boat-load of water was being hoisted over the side of the Red Gauntlet. The latter, who saw the English gun-brig already under way, and heading out to sea, decided to go at once in search of the War-Cloud and her consort, and while recalling the few men she had on shore, warned every American vessel at once to leave those dangerous waters, and to make for home ports or the convoy of the squadron under *Commodore* Brent—for such was the flag now worn at the main-truck of the War-Cloud.

In less than two hours every craft that carried the American flag was outside the roads of Singapore, dreading the approach of a fleet that would have been but too glad to take advantage of their weak condition.

Harry Brent, now boldly reading his commission to his crew, avowed his intention of hurrying back to Baltimore, getting rid of his cargo, doubling his force of men, and putting at once to sea as a privateer with no object but to prey on British commerce and punish English perfidy.

"I shall not try to take any prizes so far away from home, with no men to spare to run them into port," he announced, "but if any Englishman offers to trouble me—he'll get all I'm able to give him as an offset."

The corvette *Fire Fly*, of which Lieutenant Morris was the executive officer, and Commander Renshaw commanding, was one of the fastest vessels of her class in the United States Navy, and when she headed for the point where she expected to find the War-Cloud and her consorts of the American squadron, she ran but a little off the course of the Red Gauntlet.

But the latter had her hull down before night, and, standing on, was sweeping forward on the

course for home, making her twelve knots in a fore-royal breeze.

Harry had no desire to see his father yet. He had a name to make in fair and manly battle, and he wished to make it before he stood in the presence of him who had taunted him with cowardice, though he knew no braver boy ever drew a sword for "God and his native land."

All that day the schooner bowled merrily along without incident, and then came an affair which, while unexpected, showed that Providence still smiled upon the young patriot, and that his luck went with his pluck.

Just as the sun was going down, and the round full moon showing up in its place, a very pretty man-of-war brig was seen standing out from a little bay in the narrow straits through which they were passing.

She carried the English flag, but her men were not at quarters; she evidently knew nothing of the war news. Under easy sail, as if intending only to speak the stranger, whose colors had not yet been run up, the brig stood toward the schooner.

"We'll board and take that craft without a shot!" cried Harry, as he saw that only the watch lay about the deck, careless and unsuspecting.

"Arm down below—with pike, pistol and cutlass! Tom Breeze, have the grappling-irons ready and make fast, the instant we're alongside!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the reply, as steady and calm as the orders.

In five minutes the two vessels were almost yard-arm and yard-arm.

"Schooner ahoy! Look out, or you'll be into us!"

"Just where I'm coming!" shouted Harry, as the vessels crashed together, and he, with the chevalier and forty men, dashed upon her deck, while Tom Breeze ran the American ensign to the peak!

The officers and crew of the brig were so utterly surprised that they were overpowered before they could take a weapon in hand, and the young captain of the brig—it was his first command—wept with rage and mortification when he was ordered on board of the Red Gauntlet, American privateer, and sent into her cabin under guard.

Until he was in possession of the brig, and knew that he held nearly one hundred officers and men as prisoners, Harry Brent hardly realized what he had on his hands.

Before they knew his force, he had all the small-arms removed from the brig to his schooner, her officers all under guard on his own craft and the crew of the brig all sent below, with his own armed guard at the hatches.

The Chevalier Duval was placed over the prisoners on the Red Gauntlet, as special officer of the guard, and they were given their choice of a parole of honor not to attempt escape or close confinement.

And now, after a brief talk with his two officers, Seth Coffin and Josiah Nettles, Harry put the brig in charge of the former, with twenty men to guard and sail her, and in close company bore away on a course on which he hoped to intercept the corvette *Fire Fly*, if he did not find his father's squadron.

For he knew he never could take that brig-of-war and all the prisoners safely to the United States with only his scanty crew to depend on.

It is an old adage that fortune favors the brave. Just twenty-four hours of suspense and anxiety were borne by the young privateersman before relief came to his mind.

In all this time he did not sleep a wink, neither did he sit down to a square meal.

With his guns double-shotted, his men at the batteries ready to use them, he watched the brig as both, under easy canvas, stood on, while he looked with an anxious eye for the men-of-war that flew the starry flag.

By meeting them only could he secure a prize-crew to send his capture home or into a neutral port where a proper disposition could be made of her.

The next afternoon after his bloodless capture, he saw to his joy a fleet of square-rigged craft ahead, and it was not long before he knew the taunt masts and square yards of his old ship—the frigate *War-Cloud*.

Quickly he had a signal aloft.

"Bear down and help me hold a prize, a British brig-of-war!"

Night fell before the squadron of which the *Fire Fly* formed a part closed in with him, and then, under the guns of the old *War-Cloud*, the boy hero felt as if his prize was secure from recapture, at least by her own mortified officers and men.

Hailed by his father from the quarter-deck and asked what he had captured, Harry answered:

"The British brig-of-war *Lark* was boarded by the Red Gauntlet and captured at sunset last night, receiving her first knowledge that war had been declared when I pulled down her flag."

"Taken entirely by surprise the capture was not resisted, for we had her so fully in our pow-

er under our double-shotted guns, that we could have sunk her in five minutes.

"Her crew and officers double mine, and if you do not furnish a prize-crew and officers to take her in, I shall set the prisoners ashore on parole and destroy the brig!"

"We'll give you a prize crew from the squadron, my brave boy! Heave to in company with the fleet and come on board the War-Cloud to supper with me!"

Tears were in Harry's eyes when he heard these words, and soon after, when the second officer of the War-Cloud, her former third lieutenant, came on board, with a boat's crew to aid in the care of prize and prisoners, Harry went to meet his father.

What passed between them no one could tell, for they met alone in the cabin of the frigate. But tears of joy were in Harry's eyes when Lieutenant Neville was sent for to come into the cabin to join father and son at supper.

"I would like to have Harry back with us in the War-Cloud," said the old commodore, "but he has begun his career so nobly as a privateer, that I cannot find it in my heart to deprive him of his chance for fame and fortune."

"I shall write to the Secretary of the Navy, by him, detailing all the facts, and that I have put him and Tom Breeze on my roll as absent on leave by my authority."

"And I will also ask to have the Red Gauntlet purchased for the regular navy with her present officers commissioned in her. And I think if this headstrong boy makes another capture as daring as the last, he'll find no trouble in becoming a regular instead of a privateer!"

"I'll try, father. I've had luck with me so far, and I hope to deserve more of it!"

"You will, Harry—you will. If you see your uncle Carroll before I do tell him I never was so proud of our name as I am now. Thank him from me for his kindness to you. And now, take my advice. I shall distribute your prisoners in my squadron, and keep them for exchange. I shall put two officers and enough men on board your prize to navigate her to the nearest American port where she will be turned over to the Government as your prize, which she lawfully is. And if you will take my advice you will steer for Baltimore and get there as soon as you can. There, ship full fifty more men and you will then have enough to fight your schooner gallantly and well. If you even have a few more than a hundred it will be all the better!"

"Your advice is good, sir, and I shall take it," was the reply of the young captain.

An hour later he was dreaming happy dreams in his own cabin on the Red Gauntlet.

The next morning the Red Gauntlet, bearing dispatches for the home Government at Washington, headed on her course for Baltimore. With her, manned and officered from the fleet, sailed the prize, with none of her late officers and crew on board. She carried the American flag at her gaff, and being a fine sailor, though not so fast as the Red Gauntlet, held company with her under a heavier press of canvas.

As many of her arms as were needed by the prize crew for defense were restored to her from the schooner, and her batteries put in shape should their use be required.

Commodore Brent had decided to keep his squadron together and to do all he could to protect American commerce in those remote seas until he received orders from his Government. He knew he would need all his ships if he fell in with the larger and heavier fleet which the English had in those waters, and he hoped to take the enemy in detail when all were not together, if he met them, as he wished to do.

He knew that many American vessels which had not received the war news would be caught if he left the station, and his duty was to cruise in those waters until relieved, or ordered home.

His frigate had been badly damaged by the piratical guns when she was ashore, and this made a part of his report to the Secretary of the Navy, as also the gallant manner in which the Red Gauntlet bore down to his rescue, when the rest of his fleet were too far off to save him.

He had, in this report, asked to be called back to the coast of the United States, believing that there the great naval battles of the war would be fought. The result of all this we will know by and by.

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING RUN.

FROM the moment war was declared by act of Congress, and the proclamation of President James Madison issued, June 19th, 1812, Baltimore was full of excitement. Off the coast fleets of British men-of-war were hovering, to cut off all commerce; the seaboard towns were threatened, and wherever, by bays or rivers, the enemy could approach from sea, attack was threatened and expected.

Recruiting for the army and navy was constant, and the citizens old and young enrolled for the defense of homes and families.

Mr. Carroll Brent, with almost all his great interests scattered over foreign seas, did not for a moment falter in patriotism. His purse and influence were used freely to strengthen the

Government, and no matter who found fault with increased taxation and decrease of profits, he took things as they came and made no complaint.

The most he dreaded was the advance of the heavy fleets below up to the town itself, and a bombardment or a-sault which would endanger the lives of those most dear to him.

To be prepared for such an event, he organized, armed and caused to be drilled in military duty, all of his employees from the shipyard, the docks and the stores. Even Nicodemus Sparkle was put on duty, and at the drills, which occurred twice a week, acquired considerable proficiency. But he never could fire a gun without shutting both eyes.

Mr. Carroll Brent had only heard from the Red Gauntlet twice since she left her dock. First the news brought by the pilot-boat, of her escape from the British sloop-of-war, off the capes; second, her gallant attack upon the pirates in the Straits of Sumatra, which had reached the public through a report made to the Secretary of the Navy, by Commodore Brent of the Asiatic fleet.

"Is it not time the Red Gauntlet was in port, dear papa?" asked Lucille, one morning in September—the latter part of the month—when the equinoctial gales were considered as over for the season.

She had been terribly worried while they were raging, for she some way seemed to think of nothing but the Red Gauntlet and her voyage, judging from her talk; it seemed always on her mind.

"Yes, daughter, she should be here now, allowing her full time for the voyage out and back. But there are delays of which we may be ignorant. She may be blockaded in some port, or have been disabled in some of the heavy blows which have swept the ocean. Again, it will be no easy task to pass the countless ships-of-war which England has thrown along our coast. Their ships outnumber ours at least ten to one, and yet, when it comes to captures and victories, I think we are more than holding our own."

This conversation took place at the breakfast-table in the merchant's house, and the meal had just ended when a message came from the stores for Mr. Brent. It was brought by Nicodemus Sparkle.

"Morris, the pilot, sir, wants to see you," said the clerk. "He thinks the Red Gauntlet is off the bay. A schooner very like her in rig hove in sight before he left below. She came well inshore, but there were six English men-of-war in the lower bay and she stood out to sea when she sighted them. There was a brig in company or in chase of her, the pilot couldn't say which, though he saw no firing, and both craft were too far out to show their colors."

"She'll slip in at night, if it is the Red Gauntlet!" said the merchant, as he hurried out to see the pilot.

It was true that the Red Gauntlet was off the coast, and with her the prize-brig.

When they sighted the light-houses on Cape Charles and Cape Henry, Harry Brent, who had just outsailed two heavy English ships-of-war, hoped to have a free channel before him, since he had lost sight of his pursuers just below Hatteras; but, while under all the sail he dared to carry and keep his prize consort in his wake, he made out a line of vessels at anchor inside the bay, and soon knew that the enemy lay there quietly waiting to gobble up any craft which came under reach of their guns.

They did not make sail until he hauled his wind and stood offshore; then six of them were seen to hoist sail and get under way in a hurry, leaving three or four yet at anchor.

Harry Brent ran within hail of the brig, which he proudly hoped would bear the Red Gauntlet company into Baltimore, and conferred with the lieutenant in command in regard to what now should be done.

"I would run for the Delaware," said the latter. "They will perhaps be less watchful off the capes there."

"It is Baltimore for me, or no port at all on this coast!" said Harry, resolutely. "You can take your choice—Philadelphia, New York or Boston, if you can make them. If I had a good pilot I'd risk running that line in the night, and go in here."

"Run by soundings, course and chart," said the other. "For night-work I'd trust to them as soon as I would to a pilot."

"I fear I'll have to," said Harry, thoughtfully. "If we could only draw all the enemy offshore in chase, we might play them a trick and get inside of them after dark. But I see the largest yet lay in there at anchor."

"Yes; and we must look out, or some of the others will get in range of us; they're crowding on all their canvas."

Harry laughed.

"We need fear no craft they can send out," was his answer.

Heading offshore, though under less sail than the English ships astern were carrying, the schooner and brig soon left them far behind.

Until dark, keeping just out of gunshot of the nearest pursuing frigate, the two Americans kept almost side by side.

"Show no lights. Do as you like on the

brig!" cried Harry, when night was fairly set in; "I'm going to risk dodging the fleet and try to get in. I shall haul up north for an hour and then steer for the Cape Charles light."

"I'll stick by you, Captain Brent; we'll sink or swim together!" was the answer.

Harry had cleared for action when they first sighted the enemy. Not that he had a thought of fighting his way through so large a fleet, or trying such a mad adventure, but to be ready for any unexpected exigency.

Putting out every light, Harry stood north just an hour, as understood with the brig, both under easy sail.

Rockets thrown up by the English fleet signaling to each other far off to the southeast, showed that the enemy were still on the course they were holding at dark.

When the Red Gauntlet bore away on her course for Cape Charles the brig was so close aboard that the flapping of her sails could be heard.

"Follow me if you can," ordered Harry, as he passed the brig. "I shall hug the north shore as close as soundings will allow. If we are seen and fired into, don't mind me—make your own run in as best you can. If we are not seen, with this wind holding we'll be in Baltimore before the next sun sets!"

"I hope we shall. I'll crowd you close!" cried the plucky commander of the prize, as he, too, bore away in the wake of the Red Gauntlet.

For the next hour, silent, steady on the course, the swift schooner sped along. The wind was now on her quarter, and with only her fore and aft sails set, ready to haul up in a second if necessary, the lights on the capes rose brighter and brighter to the anxious eyes on board.

The roll of the ground swell told when they were shoaling their water, and when the land lead touched bottom in six fathoms, Harry knew that his risks were coming swiftly on.

"Have a leadsman in each fore-chains, Mr. Coffin!" he said. "Let them make their casts alternately and pass the word back to me in a low tone. We're too close on the weather shore for any carelessness now."

When it got down to four fathoms and the light was well on the weather bow, Harry dared not luff in any closer, but had to bear away to deepen the water for fear of the sand spit off the light, marked down in his chart.

Now the brig was out of sight and hearing, and Harry had lost all idea of her position.

Suddenly, when the water was again shoaling, flash after flash was seen far out to sea; then the reports of guns were heard.

"It cannot be the brig that is engaged!" remarked young Brent to Coffin, who stood by his side on the quarter-deck.

Nettles was looking out forward.

"Captin, I shouldn't wonder if two or three of them Britishers had run afoul of each other in the dark and got to peppering each other, a-thinking it's us they're a-fightin'!"

"It may be so!" assented Harry; "at dark no sail was in sight outside of us. Ah, look there! Luff, at the helm—luff inshore! Keep the lead going lively! See to it yourself, Mr. Coffin!"

Blue-lights burning and three rockets sent up, less than a mile off on their lee beam, told the proximity of an enemy.

Though the sea was lighted up so they saw two of the anchored ships plainly to leeward, Harry hoped his vessel had not been seen, and that those on the British vessels were too much occupied with the combat going on outside to think of anything nearer in.

Suddenly, events it had come on, the firing ceased out seaward, and then blue-lights and rockets were seen in that direction, evidently vessels exchanging night signals.

The schooner still held her course into the great bay, hugging the weather shore just as close as soundings would allow. No alarm came from the ships at anchor.

"We'll go by—we'll go by, all unseen!" was the exclamation made by Harry Brent a half-hour later.

He had hardly dared to hope before.

"I wish I knew the brig was as safe as we seem to be!"

"An hour more will tell the story!" returned Mr. Coffin, "for 'twill be light enough then to look about us! Hark! I heard the creak of a tackle-block here on our lee bow!"

"Stand to your guns!" commanded Harry, in a low tone; "it may be another of the ships in the British line!"

"She's under way, if it is, for I hear the dash of water from another hull than ours," announced Coffin.

"*Mon Dieu!* If it is a bi'-steak we shall cook heem," chimed in the chevalier, who stood near by, fully armed.

A minute later the schooner was nearly alongside a two-masted fore-and-after standing the same course she was.

"Sheer in! sheer in! We'll lay her aboard!" said Harry in a low tone to the man at the helm.

"Look out—look out there!" cried a sharp voice; "you'll smash all creation out o' me if you don't luff and hold your wind."

"Jerusalem! That's Ebenezer Coffin's voice,

or I'm a liar," cried the first officer of the Red Gauntlet.

The vessels, now side by side, were not an oar's length apart when this occurred.

"I am Ebenezer Coffin, and if you ain't brother Seth, you're his ghost," cried the same sharp voice.

"What are you doin' here?" cried Seth, in amazement.

"Runnin' in a cargo o' sugar an' coffee for Baltimore, if I can dodge the durned Britishers," was the answer. "I'm just six days from Havana, and have run up inside o' Hatteras and scrouged in arter dark. What be you in, Seth?"

"A clipper craft, Ebenezer. Jest keep company with us, if you can, till daylight, and you'll see then," was the answer, for the Red Gauntlet was fast forging ahead.

"I will, if I can, but you're slidin' right by me," was the answer, as the larger schooner sped on in the darkness.

When day dawned Harry Brent was made happy, for he could see just where he was.

He was inside the great Chesapeake; the British blockaders were hull down, to seaward, and the prize-brig was nearly astern, not over a couple of miles off, in his wake.

The schooner they had passed and spoken was in close vicinity to the brig, and had evidently been spoken by her.

"We are safe, but I wish the wind would freshen," observed Harry Brent. "It seems as if 'twas dying away."

"We'll have enough to carry us in 'tween now and another mornin'," answered Seth Coffin, who was the best weather-prophet they had on board. "Wasn't it funny we should strike in here at the same time with Ebenezer? He has run his craft, the Sally Ann, for years in the Havana trade, and he is as sharp as chain lightning, Ebenezer is. He isn't so fast as we, though, for we're dropping him, and he has all his canvas on, too. But he knows the way in; he'll not need our piloting."

Nicodemus Sparkle had achieved two successes. He had raised a mustache that could be seen without a magnifying glass on a clear day, and he had been made a corporal in the Carroll Brent Company of Home Guards. For now, in consequence of war perils, the old style of watchmen was discontinued along the wharves of Baltimore, and armed guards were posted at all accessible approaches by water.

He was on guard duty on the morning succeeding the day when the Red Gauntlet headed up the Chesapeake in company with her prize and the other blockade runner, commanded by Ebenezer Coffin.

In charge of the daylight relief, he was marching to change sentinels at the post fronting his employer's property, when a sight met his gaze that utterly astounded him.

At anchor, right off the main wharf, lay a rakish schooner, painted red, with her guns run out and her deck full of men—or so it looked to him.

Ahead lay a black-looking brig, evidently armed heavily, her deck, too, full of men, and his face turned white as a sheet when he saw a British flag flying at her foremast-head.

"Gosh all hemlock! The British are here!" he yelled, and, without pausing to take a second look, he turned and ran up the street, dropping his gun as he went, shouting:

"The British are here! The British are here!"

The cry was taken up by others as he dashed on, and when the terror-stricken fellow reached the house of Mr. Brent, on Calvert street, the alarm-bells were ringing from steeples, and the whole town was aroused and wild with excitement.

Corporal Sparkle did not see a man in the act of knocking at Carroll Brent's door when he arrived in front and shouted:

"The British are on us! Their ships are at the wharves!"

But he felt the weight of Harry Brent's foot, a second after, as it kicked him half-way across the street, while he cast a despairing look up at a window above, where Lucille Brent, in a lovely night-wrapper, stood wondering what on earth was the cause of the terrible alarm that rung so loud over town.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLORIOUS RECEPTION.

"IDIOT! FOOL! What do you mean, trying to scare everybody out of their senses?" cried Harry Brent, as Nicodemus crawled up from the dirt into which the latter had sent him sprawling.

"The British are on us! I've seen their ships and their flag!" groaned poor Sparkle. "There—there—hear their guns! Now you'll believe me?" and loud above the clangor of the alarm-bells, came the sharp report of cannon fired rapidly.

"It is only a salute of thirteen guns from my battery. The Red Gauntlet is in, safe, and a British gun brig, a prize, is here too!" cried Harry, addressing his uncle, who now stood beside Lucille, at the window above.

"Thank Heaven! It is our Harry, with good

news!" cried the merchant. "I'll be down to let you in in a moment."

"You've kicked me, sir—me, Nicodemus Sparkle, a corporal in the Home Guards, sir, and I'll have satisfaction, sir!" cried the unfortunate clerk, wild with rage, for he saw Lucille Brent laugh as she pointed him out to her father.

And he strode up to Harry, as if he meditated an immediate attack on him. The latter looked an instant at his well-dusted figure, and joined in the laughter of the merry girl above, as he said:

"Why, Sparkle, my boy, I didn't know you. You were screeching so like a monkey I mistook you for one! Did I hurt you any, poor child?"

"You've hurt my honor, sir! You've made a laughing-stock of me, sir! And I'll have your heart's blood for it, sir! I'll show you I'm blue-blood, sir, and I'll—"

"Subside! Subside, Sparkle, or I'll have to kick you into the middle of next week instead of over the gutter!" and Harry turned so suddenly on Sparkle that the latter forgot his valiant commencement and fled out of reach of attack.

By this time Mr. Carroll Brent was at the door, and poor Sparkle, from across the street, saw him embrace his nephew, and a minute later groaned in agony when, through the parlor window, he saw the white arms of Lucille Brent thrown about Harry's neck, while her ruby lips rained kisses on his weather-bronzed face.

"Gosh all hemlock!" he groaned. "I'm a ruined and degraded man! I've been kicked! She saw it done; and now she is kissing him who kicked me! I'll kill him, if I'm hung for it! Ah—there goes more guns! I know the British are here!"

The guns of Fort McHenry were answering the salute fired from the Red Gauntlet.

The bells still rung loud, from every steeple. People ran to and fro, and shout upon shout rose on every side. It was not the clangor of alarm, though, now. It was the sound of rejoicing, for the news spread fast, and far, and wide.

The Red Privateer, already famous, had come in with a prize, on a blockade-covered coast, and lay safe in their waters, where they could see her and her brave officers and crew, and honor them according to their merits.

Poor Nicodemus Sparkle had gone back, heart-sick and disconsolate, to the guard he had deserted, only to find himself under arrest for throwing away his gun and failing to post the relief guard as he had been ordered to do.

Then he saw that the English flag, which had terrified him so, was hoisted union down, forward on the prize, and that aft the STAR SPANGLED FLAG flew at her gaff as well as on board the war and weather-stained privateer.

And he realized what an idiotic donkey he had made of himself, and he wept in the intensity of shame and mortification.

Meantime the house of Carroll Brent was invaded by the leading men of the city, who crowded there to congratulate the merchant and his gallant nephew. The city press was busy in spreading the news in extra sheets, and the wharves were filled with a cheering multitude which gazed on the gallant privateer and her prize with eyes of wonder and shouts of joy.

Harry Brent, without delay, sent a mounted courier to Washington with his dispatches, ordering him to change horses often and make the best time he could. In his own letter to the Secretary of the Navy, he inclosed the report of the prize-master on the English brig-of-war, and reported that the latter could be fitted for almost immediate use in our own navy.

When Mr. Carroll Brent saw the bills of lading which came with the cargo of the Red Gauntlet he was more than satisfied with the result of the voyage. He gave every officer and man on board two months' extra pay, saying that his profits warranted even greater liberality.

Three days later a pilot from below enlightened the young commander and his crew on the cause of the firing they had heard off the Capes the night they were running in.

The two vessels which had been in chase of Harry off Hatteras had come suddenly on the English vessels standing off in search of the schooner and brig, and had fired on them before knowing they were of their own flag.

"It was a case of 'dog eat dog—who cares!'" was the comment of Seth Coffin, when he heard of it.

Hastening to get her cargo out and to refit the Red Gauntlet for sea, Harry Brent advertised for seventy-five more men—fifty first-class seamen, and twenty-five good shots and able young men to act as marines under the command of the Chevalier Duval.

He boldly announced his craft as a commissioned privateer, and promised the crew plenty of chances for prize-money and gallant service.

Men offered by scores before the ink was hardly dry on the paper, which advertised for them. The only trouble was to select the very best from so many.

Arms, provisions and ammunition were liberally provided by Carroll Brent, and within a week the Red Privateer, refitted, repainted and with a full crew of one hundred and twenty-

five before the mast—three lieutenants, two surgeons and the gallant chevalier as captain of marines, was reported by her young captain, Harry Brent, as ready for sea.

The next thing was to get there. The British men-of-war in the mouth of the bay, as well as many off the coast, had heard of the famous Red Privateer and her exploits, and it was determined she never should get to sea if they could intercept and sink her.

Watching day and night, even keeping patrol boats on the bay, they used the most untiring vigilance, intent upon her capture or destruction.

The Government had accepted and purchased the prize-brig, Lark, and renamed her The Stranger, and the crew of the Red Gauntlet received their share of her value as prize-money while yet in port.

Kept posted as to matters in the bay below by friendly and patriotic pilots, Harry got his craft in perfect order, drilled his new crew to duty and waited the right time to sail.

He had employed a coast pilot, an old man who knew the channel into every port on the Atlantic coast and who had also seen much service abroad.

"Give us a nor'west gale and a dark night and I'll stake my life I'll take you safe to sea!" said the old pilot. "The harder it blows, the better for us, for the less will they expect to see us take the risk at such a time."

Harry saw a good deal to admire in his fair cousin, Lucille—cousin by her adoption as the daughter of his uncle Carroll.

She was not only very pretty and vivacious, but really talented, especially in music.

And it was not to be wondered at that the two grew to like each other very much. Harry was good-looking, and all women admire courage, of which he had given such manifest proof.

"I wish that uncle would remove you and my dear aunt out to his country-place," said Harry, while conversing with Lucille. "I hear of so many cruel outrages committed along our coast by the enemy—burning of properties, pillage and murders of unarmed and defenseless people, that it fills my heart with anxiety as well as indignation. If they only knew it, they are only provoking a deadly course of reprisal."

"War is cruel, no matter how it is conducted," said Lucille; "but I do not believe it ever will reach us here. Our ships on the sea and our armies on the shore surely should keep the enemy back."

"They might if that enemy was not so powerful by land and sea, my dear Lucille!" responded Harry. "Fleets of English transports, convoyed by English squadrons containing more ships than we have in our entire navy, are now reported as crossing the ocean, filled with soldiers which are to try to crush this country into submission. They will not do it. We have right on our side, and even in England there is a strong party who believe us as right now as we were in the Revolution. But I must leave you and go on board. It looks to me as if a storm was brewing. If there is, it may give me a chance to get to sea. Once there, you shall hear from me, if I have the good fortune I pray for!"

"I shall be anxious and yet not fearful, Harry. I know you will do credit to yourself and those under you. And I will pray, day and night, that your life may be spared and that soon—very soon—an honorable peace may be secured!"

Thus—they parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

MR. CARROLL BRENT was the last to say good-by to his nephew, when the latter decided to go down the bay to the nearest point where he could lay out of sight of the British cruisers and yet be ready for a rush out to sea in storm and darkness as he had planned.

"God bless you, my dear boy—go and prosper!" were his last words. "You have as good a craft under you as ever floated. Do not lose her by attempting impossibilities. Undertake only that which can be done and you'll do it. I know you will never disgrace your name by any act of dishonor; I only fear you will show too much bravery."

"I'll be as prudent as I can be, dear uncle. But if they burn and pillage on our coast, they must not grumble if their own coast gets a little of the same kind of treatment!"

Carroll Brent came on shore only when the Red Gauntlet was under way, heading down the Chesapeake, with the mantle of night just falling upon it.

Harry trod his quarter-deck now with a feeling of strength and pride almost indescribable. His vessel was fully officered and manned, fitted out in the most efficient manner, and he had no "orders" from any source to control him. Though far from feeling above taking advice from those older and more experienced than he, he really was independent of all control.

Standing down the almost deserted bay, for the blockade had literally cut off all ingress and egress to those waters, the pilot took the schooner into a little nook below Pocomoke, where she could lay unseen by any spying crew

sent up by the invaders, and wait for the change of weather which would favor an attempt to go to sea.

A week passed, and all Harry had to do to pass his time was to drill his men and send out small parties for fish, oysters and game to add to their stock of provisions rather than to diminish them. They were far enough up the bay to avoid the predatory parties sent out from the British ships, which, lower down, left the poor inhabitants little to live on.

While in his hiding-place, the brother of Lieutenant Seth Coffin ran in with his craft. He, too, was waiting for weather in which to dodge the watchful enemy and get to sea with a cargo of flour and bacon that he had for Havana, where he intended to reload with sugar and coffee as usual.

Though unarmed and short-handed, Ebenezer Coffin was shrewd and fearless, and had no doubt of success, for he knew the bay and coast perfectly; and his vessel, too, and could pass in shoal water where few others dared to venture, and where the heavy ships of the enemy could not float.

"At last! At last!" cried Harry Brent, as night came on, with a drizzling rain and the wind in fitful squalls puffed out from the westward, tending northerly.

All hands were on board—supper was called early, and then, with guns loose and already double-shotted for close action, only such sail set as could be used to the best advantage in the fresh, nasty gusts which began to roughen the lower bay, the Red Privateer was loosened from her moorings in a tree-sheltered little bay, and dropped out with the first of an ebb tide.

The English fleet lay anchored thick, about twenty miles below, and it was also known that cruisers were plenty outside, for Harry had sent boats down inshore to points of observation, and he was well posted as to what might be in his way.

No lights were allowed, except one in a sheltered binnacle, where only the pilot and helmsman could see the compass.

The men who threw a sounding-lead from either side of the fore rigging, were to pass the depth of water in a low tone to men stationed between them and the pilot. Every order was to be given in the same way. Not a precaution was forgotten.

For nearly two hours the Red Gauntlet sailed on a compass course, and not a light was seen, or a sound heard to show the vicinity of an enemy.

"They're cunning," said the pilot. "They know it is the kind o' night for running out and in, and they've doused every glim themselves. If we see one it'll be when we're afoul of 'em. Blow, good breezes, blow, and drive us out o' this!"

"Where are we now?" asked Harry, as he saw the pilot take the bearings of a beacon light away to the starboard.

"Nearly off Hampton, and we ought to be right among 'em, if they're where they mostly lay," was the answer, in a low tone. "Ah—d'ye hear that?"

"It is the splash of muffled oars rising and falling in the water," said Harry. "And they're close aboard."

"We've passed them. It is darker than pitch, cap'n," was the remark the pilot made, after listening a few moments, almost without breathing.

The wind now blew heavier. They were drawing out where it had a full sweep.

Suddenly they shot by so close to a black, lofty hull, that it seemed as if their masts would hit the square yards that literally hung over them.

"Ship, ahoy! What craft is that?" came out in a gruff hail that seemed near enough to be on their own deck.

Not an answer. Not a loud breath in reply, and the privateer sped on in the darkness.

"You saw nothing," Harry heard some one cry out.

"I saw and heard the rush of some craft," came faintly from astern.

Yet no light was seen, nor was a gun fired. The man who hailed must have been in doubt.

"Hark! I hear canvas flapping. Port a little. It is on our weather bow," came from the pilot. "Starboard at the helm! Fall away two or three points!"

A minute more and they were past another danger. A vessel beating in against the wind was tacking near by, and made noise enough to show where she was, while it drowned the dash from the sharp bows of the Red Privateer.

"We're right in the heart of the fleet," said Harry.

Another dark hull was close aboard.

"A sail! A sail!" shouted a keen-eyed officer, or lookout from this craft.

"On with the canvas—every thread we can carry. We're in for it now!" cried Harry, as a dozen blue lights and two bright rockets went hissing up into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GAUNTLET'S ESCAPE.

THE schooner rushed on, and a second later a half-dozen alarm-guns rung out over the water.

Lights flashed here and there, and these helped the brave pilot to steer clear of the ships that showed them.

On—with his guns manned and ready to use—Harry steered his craft, no light to show the enemy where to aim and shot flying all around him, for the vessel they had passed fired on the course he had held. It seemed as if the sea was alive now with vessels, far and near.

Suddenly firing was heard and seen astern and in more toward Hampton.

"They're after Ebenezer, and that'll help us!" said Seth. "I hope the consarned beef-eaters won't get him!"

For a mile or more the privateer rushed on in darkness, and then again all was bright around her.

Another craft throwing rockets had lightened up her white sails, and now Harry found himself almost between two ships and not a pistol-shot from either, and both hailed him at once and ordered him to heave to.

"Let them have it from both batteries!" cried the young hero, and the schooner trembled from stem to stern with the heavy shock of her double-shotted guns.

And he laughed wildly a minute later, for the gun-decks of two frigates were all ablaze as he shot off into the gloom beyond their fire, two rents only in his mainsail and a quarter-boat struck at the davits, making his damage, for there was a crashing of shot astern which told that the enemy had fired into each other while they narrowly missed him.

"Not another shot from us—if we can help it—but have all ready!" was the next order from Harry.

"Bear away—bear away four points. We'll run in for the Norfolk channel and fool them outside!" cried the pilot, for a perfect line of rockets were seen shooting up ahead and far to seaward.

Again they were wrapped in gloom, and Harry had time to ask if anybody had been hit by splinters from the shattered boat.

One man had been hurt and was carried below—that was all.

They seemed now to run into smoother water and certainly were out of the nest of danger that had for a moment completely environed them.

"Can't we get to sea?" asked Harry, almost wild with disappointment, as the pilot seemed to haul up entirely off the course that would carry them out.

"Yes, sir—but not through *that* line o' fire!" answered the old pilot. "I'm goin' to hug the shore around the lower cape, closer than any o' them dare run, and then steer down the coast inside o' Hatteras. Don't fret, cap'n—I'll do it. See the lead is goin' all the while—tend to sheets and braces sharp—we're doin' the best we can!"

The schooner now had every sail set that her spars would bear and was rushing through the water at fearful speed.

The soundings grew less and less until Harry knew he had not a fathom to spare between his keel and the bottom. All depended on the bold pilot now. If his knowledge and judgment failed they knew wreck and destruction would be the result.

On—they swept, and the dash of breakers on their lee was plainly heard.

"Luff—luff a single point, no more. Keep the lead going fast, men—fast!" came sternly from his lips.

Ten minutes later they deepened a fathom more.

"We'll dodge 'em yet! See, we're slippin' around the point!" said the pilot, touching Harry Brent on the arm. "There are none of 'em dare run in here—we'll have shoals outside of us in a little while, and then—then good-by to Johnny Bull for this bout!"

Harry Brent drew a long sigh of relief. He feared wreck more than he did the guns of his enemies, but the water deepened while it grew smooth, and the pilot spoke so confidently, all his courage came to his relief, and he hoped there was a free road to sea.

A half-hour more, and they hauled up along the coast, with the wind on their starboard beam, or perhaps a little quartering. It came still in heavy gusts off the land, forcing them to take in their lofty sail and run under fore and aft canvas.

But they were all right now. There were shoals outside which no enemy could cross by night or day, and they were heading straight for the deep swash inside by Hatteras.

The guns were now secured—one watch sent below to rest, and though Harry and the pilot still held their posts on deck, the crew knew they were free from the blockade for the time.

When his steward brought out coffee for Harry and his officers at the break of day, Harry Brent saw the white breakers of Hatteras dashing high to leeward of him, and ahead there was no sail in sight!

They were darting along the smooth water on the inside channel known only to the best of pilots and marked on the charts as too narrow and dangerous to trust.

But with his pilot the young captain had no fear.

"Ebenezer is out, safe, and in our wake!" announced Seth Coffin, just after day dawned, and he pointed to the white sails of the Sally Ann coming down the coast.

That the Englishman had discovered the escaping privateer was evident from the way they made sail outside, but they had no chance to overhaul her in the rough sea outside with the Gulf current in their teeth, not even if any of them had the speed to cope with her.

So Harry and his brave crew laughed as they sped along, confident of reaching blue water with a free sheet and an open course to choose when once off soundings.

That day at noon the Red Gauntlet had hauled up on her port tack and was stretching out on the blue Atlantic, free and ready to snap up the first craft she met which flaunted the flag of St. George in presence of the Stars and Stripes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

SEVERAL days passed anxiously to Mr. Carroll Brent before he received positive news that the Red Gauntlet had got safely to sea. The firing on that stormy night had been heard by pilots and fishermen, but none were near enough at dawn to see her slipping off by the inside channel, and the news reached him at last overland by a letter sent through Hatteras inlet by a pilot skiff which Harry Brent had spoken off the coast.

Lucille, whose whole life now seemed to be linked with the success and safety of Harry Brent, was happy when it came.

Only Nicodemus Sparkle was made wretched by the news. He hated young Brent with all the bitterness of his narrow nature. He had never gotten over the injury his "honor" received on the occasion when he "raised the town" with his false alarm.

"Gosh all hemlock!" he groaned. "Everybody has luck but me. If I'd been aboard that schooner I'd have lost a leg or an arm or fell overboard to be eaten by a shark—I know I should. I wish I was *dead* and *buried*, so I do!"

He hated to drill—he hated to do anything and everything, for he had a faculty of getting into some new trouble almost every day. Worst of all, he never saw Lucille without eliciting laughter from her, for she could not forget how he looked when Harry Brent astonished him by lifting him into the middle of the street with his foot.

On the very morning the news came that Harry had safely run the blockade, he had to carry the letter up to the mansion, and he would rather have performed some other duty.

Lucille came to the door instead of sending a servant to answer his knock, for she had seen him coming up the street and wanted to tease him a little.

"Are the British in port, Mr. Sparkle?" she asked.

"No, ma'am! I only wish they *were*!" he said, as he reached out the letter.

"Why, Mr. Sparkle, *why*?"

"So you could see how we Home Guards could trim 'em out, ma'am! Gosh all hemlock! We'd—we'd—"

"Drop your muskets and run and halloo—they're comin', they're comin'!" she cried, interrupting him with a peal of laughter.

He was too angry to even try to reply.

"Do you remember the size of young Captain Brent's boot?" she asked, the next moment.

"Gosh all hemlock—yes'm!" he cried, white with passion. "Twas just the length of a saucy gal's tongue!"

And he turned away and almost ran into a dark-visaged man who stood near by with a basket on his arm, watching the girl with a strangely eager look on his swarthy face.

This man walked up to Nicodemus as soon as the door of the mansion was closed and in a low tone asked:

"Who was that you talked to just now?"

"What do you want to know for?" asked Nicodemus, his jealousy getting ahead of his anger.

"She is very beautiful! I was curious to know!"

"Well—she's my sweetheart. I hope you're satisfied!" and the dapper clerk started down the street.

"Hold on! I'm not done with you yet, sir."

The stranger spoke in a tone so stern that Sparkle, who was an arrant coward, stopped and shivered.

"What is the name of that lady, first; second, is she a resident of this place—permanent, I mean? Answer straight, or 'twill be the worse for you," said the stranger.

And his dark eyes seemed to flash fire—or so poor Sparkle imagined.

"Her name is Miss Lucille, the adopted daughter of Carroll Brent, Esquire, the merchant I work for," said Nicodemus, trembling. "And she lives here permanent when she isn't out in the country on Rock river at the villa."

"Adopted? How long has she lived with him?"

"Ever since him and his wife brought her from Canada; sixteen years, I reckon."

"From Canada! On the track at last," said the stranger, with a look of satisfaction.

"Where can I see you for an hour or two, alone?"

"Gosh all hemlock—I don't want to see you alone! What have I done that you want to see me for?"

"You have done nothing, yet. But you may do something and get well paid for it. I look poor, perhaps, but I carry more gold about me than some who are better dressed."

"Aren't you a peddler? I see you have Indian bead-work in your basket."

"I sell bead-work when the humor takes me. It may cover other business. I ask again, when can I see you alone for an hour? You may find a Spanish doubloon in your pocket when the interview is over."

"Gosh all hemlock! A gold doubloon? I can't leave the store till noon—then I've an hour for dinner, and I eat at the Sign of the White Swan on Water street close by."

"Instead—come and dine with me at the house and number marked on this card. You will not regret it. I pay liberally for service."

"That's more'n I'm used to. I've worked over twenty year in one place and haven't laid up enough to last me a year if I was sick and helpless."

"Then meet me at noon, and you may better your condition."

"I will, by gemminetty!" said Nicodemus, for he heard the jingle of gold in the stranger's pocket.

The stranger smiled, and turning on his heel passed on up the street, while Nicodemus thoughtfully returned to the store.

"I'd like to know what he meant when he said he was on the track, and whose track it was. Gosh all hemlock—s'posin' he's a pirate! They'd have lots o' Spanish gold on 'em. And I'm to meet him alone. I don't like that. But if he gives me a doubloon and the dinner, too—It's worth riskin'. I'll go—I'll go."

He looked at the card.

"Why, it's in Pell street. That's close by. Yes; I'll see what he wants. Gosh all hemlock! Who's afraid? Not me—Nicodemus Sparkle—not much."

And he strutted along the crowded street as important as a bantam rooster.

His duties at the store of his employer were not very arduous just then.

The business in a blockaded port is generally dull. But his salary went on just the same, and the less he had to do the better he was suited. For work did not agree with his nature any too well. He had rather sit on the doorstep and dream of the day when he could write Esquire to his name, than to check off a truck-load of goods any time.

So, reporting his return in the counting-room he went out and pondered over his interview with that dark-browed, ill-dressed and evil-looking stranger.

At the hour of noon, telling the porter he was going to dinner, as usual, Nicodemus Sparkle hurried to the number and street designated on the card given him. There was no name on the card.

The house was an old, two-story frame. In the lower part a regular 'longshore and sailor tippling-shop was kept. The sign was a sailor and a woman shaking hands, each holding a glass in the other hand supposed to be full of grog.

Above was a sign:

"LODGINGS TO LET."

The stranger met Nicodemus at the door opening on a stairway to the second story.

"It is well. You are prompt to time!" he said, as he led the way to a dingy back room above, lighted by a single window in the rear.

The room itself was poorly furnished, but on a table there was spread such a dinner as he never saw before, except once at the house of Carroll Brent, when the merchant had all his clerks to dinner on the twentieth anniversary of his marriage.

There was turtle soup, fish, roast meats, canvas-back duck, soft-shell crabs and two bottles of sparkling wine to wash it all down with.

"Fall to! We can eat and talk too!" said the stranger, as he pointed to a seat opposite the one he took. "Help yourself and eat hearty—everything is carved and ready."

Nicodemus needed no second bidding. He was always ready to eat, if the cost didn't come out of his own pocket. Then he was economical.

"Has this merchant, Carroll Brent, any other children besides this one you say he has adopted?" asked the stranger.

"No, sir," said the clerk, between spoonfuls of hot turtle soup.

"Are her real parents living?"

"I reckon not, sir—I heard him, that is Mr. Brent, say once her dyin' mother gave her to him and his wife, to be theirs forever."

"Dying mother, you said. Do you know where she died?"

"Up in Canada, I s'pose, for there's where they were a-visitin' when they got her."

"You do not know her real name?"

"No, sir—only I heard she was English, though Lucille seems Frenchy to me. That's her name."

"Ah! I have heard the name before, and an

English woman bore it. Now, my man, do you ever get very close to this beautiful girl? You told me this morning she was your sweet-heart!"

"Gosh all hemlock! I wish she was. It was only talk when I said that. She is never sweet on me! But I see her every day nearly, as close as you saw me to-day when I handed her a letter her father sent up."

"Can you keep a secret, if you are well paid for it?"

"Gosh all hemlock—yes! Just you try me!"

"I will, and if the secret ever leaks from your lips, I'll cut your throat from ear to ear. Here is the doubloon I promised you and another to help you hold the secret. I think I know that girl and who her parents were!"

"Gosh all hemlock. Both of these mine?" cried the astonished clerk, pocketing the doubloons in a hurry, as if he feared the stranger would take them up again.

"Yes, and if you can succeed in finding out ore thing about that girl—I'll give you five more to add to them!"

"Gosh all hemlock! I'm your man for ninety days, or all my life. That's equal to six months' salary for me! What am I to find out?"

"If the girl is the one I believe her to be—she has a birth-mark very plain and very singular on the back of her neck, low down between her shoulders—larger than a silver dollar—a red spot, with three black spots the size and shape of water-melon seeds. It is called a water-melon mark."

"Gosh all hemlock! How ever could I see that in such a place? I'd never dare to get close enough to see a mark there. Her dress or collar must cover it."

"Nevertheless, it must be seen. If it is there, I can find a fortune in it, simple as it seems."

"A fortune? Gosh all hemlock! I'd risk a good deal for a share in a real fortune."

"Then discover—I care not how—if the mark is where I describe it. If it is, you need not be a clerk on low salary any longer."

"Gosh all hemlock—I'll do it or die and be buried!"

"Remember, I am not to be known in this business—I have reasons for keeping back out of sight until I get the information I desire."

"Yes; I understand. I'm to find if the mark is there or not and get five more doubloons for doing it."

"That is what I mean. And the money is ready the moment you earn it."

"I'll do it—I don't think how, just now—but I'll do it. It may take more time than you'd like, but I'll not be any longer than I can help. Will I find you here when I'm ready?"

"Yes, this room will be mine while I stay in this city. If I am not in when you come, the head barkeeper below will tell you where I am if you ask for Doctor Rose."

"All right, sir. This is the best dinner I've had in all my life."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN AND OUT—A HOT CRUISE.

HARRY BRENT, when fairly at sea, held a quiet consultation in the cabin as to their best course and where they would be likely to strike the richest prizes. For in privateering prizes must pay expense, profits and wages, since officers, men and owners receive shares in all that is captured.

Transports under convoy, bringing provisions, arms, money to pay off troops and seamen, were coming to the British fleets doubtless. They would be very valuable. But, convoyed by men-of-war, their capture would be very risky.

This was no hindrance in Harry Brent's mind. And the fact that if such were captured they would be near some home port into which they could be taken, was another favorable point in his mind.

So, as soon as the Red Gauntlet had gained a fair offing, he had her headed down the Gulf Stream to the eastward, holding just far enough from the land to avoid the fleets of the enemy which lay so thick along the coast. He knew as well as his officers and men that regular men-of-war would give him more hard knocks than profit, and he intended to avoid all that let him alone and only to pitch into them if they cornered him.

The first day and night outside were not eventful. Under easy cruising sail—the fore and aft canvas and the foretop-sail, they stood on close-hauled, exercising the men at quarters for a couple of hours night and morning.

On the second day, when the meridian observation told them they were off the Jersey coast just above the capes of the Delaware, though not in sight of land, they saw a rakish brig standing off to the westward, and as by holding her course she would come within three or four miles, Harry concluded to see what she was.

He hoisted English colors aft, but forward he had his naval signals all ready to send up, if, as he thought, the craft should prove to be an

American brig-of-war. Her taut and rakish rig put that idea in his head.

As the brig, heading athwart his course, came within long gunshot, Harry saw, to his joy, that she was making ready for action, and that the flag of the free floated at her gaff.

He instantly changed his own colors, and asked by signals what brig it was.

"The Argus—bound on a cruise!" flew in answer from her fore truck.

"Success to you. We are on the same!" answered Harry.

"The Red Gauntlet is known. Look out for cruisers off New York." was signalled by the Argus.

And thus they passed—the Argus on her famous and daring run upon the English coast—the most famous venture of the war.

That night young Brent had a long talk with the Chevalier Duval in his cabin and learned why he so bitterly hated the English. It was a personal rather than a national hatred.

"Mon père—my father, the Baron Duval, of Lorraine, had but two children. The older was my sister, Eugenie. The other, myself, was but five years old, when an Englishman, ze son of a great lord, met my beautiful sister—she look so well as I can remembre, like your cousin, I a Belle Lucille. My father—he did not like ze Anglais, and he forbid zat man to approach my sistare. He tell her she shall see him no more. But zey love ze one ze ozzare, and zey elope and go away first to England. Mon mère—she take sick and die. My father, in despair and anger, followed to find Eugenie, and he pursue in vain. Not in England—they were gone. He hear of zem in Canada, but he could not find Eugenie or ze Englishman zat delude her from home. My father—he too take sick and he die, and I alone was left to grow up, to look over all ze world for my dear sistare in vain. Are you surprise zat I hate ze Anglais? I have had much adventure, seen much of war, but nevaro have I forgot to hate ze miserable Anglais!"

"I do not blame you!" said Harry. "I hate them because they have wronged and continue to wrong my country. Because they are proud and tyrannical when they deal with the weak—unjust and abusive to all whom they would control. And we will both fight them as long as we have a plank to stand on!"

"Oui! Yes, mon brave jeune capitaine—we will! Ah ha—I feel ze gran' appetite for a cut wiz my sword at more of ze bifsteak canaille. Now—we are strong and well prepare, we can teach zem ze lesson zey need!"

The next morning Harry rose with a gloomy look on his face. His first lieutenant noticed it and said, while at breakfast:

"You look kind o' down in the mouth, capting. I'd rather see a smile on your face! You're not gettin' homesick, be you?"

"No—Mr. Coffin—but I had a most unpleasant dream last night, and I cannot shake off the impression it has left. I thought, and my dream was so vivid it woke me, that my cousin Lucille, pale, with hair disheveled, and tears streaming down her cheeks appeared before me shrieking out:

"Harry, I am in deadly peril! Save me—SAVE ME!"

"As I told you, I woke with a cold sweat breaking out all over me and every nerve quivering."

"I am not superstitious, but I cannot shake off the idea that she is in danger—that my uncle and aunt are in peril. Of course—we cannot get to them now, or hear from them, but I feel as if I'd give the world if it were mine to know they're safe and well in Baltimore!"

"SAIL HO! close aboard! All hands on deck!" rung out clear and loud.

It was the voice of Nettles, the second officer.

In a moment dreams were out of the young captain's mind and reality was before him.

A thick fog which had enveloped them all the morning was lifting slowly before a light easterly breeze, and like specters the spars and idle sails of three vessels loomed up out of the mist to windward.

"Quietly to stations, every man, and clear for action!" was the first order which left Harry Brent's lips, as he buckled on his sword and relieved the watch officer in command.

"D'ye know that craft, capting? She'll know us, when we're as much out o' the fog as he is! We'd better up helm, and get where our long guns will be o' more use than her battery o' twenty-fours!"

"It is the same sloop-of-war that we had trouble with off the capes of Virginia!" said Harry, as he ordered the helm up and squared away. "We're in the fog yet, and she hasn't made us out!"

"Lucky too—for we're in easy reach of her broadside guns!" said Coffin.

The schooner, forging slowly ahead, was yet in the fog. Every minute was precious for her, for two other vessels, probably men-of-war, lay close to the first one seen.

"This can't last long. Thank Heaven the wind freshens. Aloft, topmen, and be ready to loose topgallantsail and royal and rig out stunn'sail booms!" said Harry, just loud enough for his orders to reach the men.

Fast rose the fog now as the wind swept in from the east, but the schooner was out of short range when the bustle on board the ships to windward showed she had been discovered.

"Up with our colors. Tom Breeze, come aft to the stern pivots!" cried Harry, in a clear joyous tone. "We'll give this fellow lesson number two, to-day, if we can hold our own!"

A gun from the sloop-of-war, answered by a similar signal from a frigate to windward of her, told Harry he was seen and most likely known, for now sail on sail was seen to fly out on the spars of the Englishmen. Harry had now all his canvas set except studdingsails, and his craft was fairly flying through the water, when the sharp boom of an answering gun in the fog to leeward of him told him of a new danger which he was running right into. Evidently it was an answer to the guns fired to windward by his enemies.

"Brace up, and luff six points!" he cried, and only in time, for he had not run half a mile on his new course, when a shot struck the water on his lee quarter, fired from out of the fog on his lee.

"We're in a hard snap, captaining!" cried Seth Coffin.

CHAPTER XVII.

LUCK AND PLUCK WIN.

"It looks like it—but we're not whipped or taken yet!" was the stern reply of our hero, as he tried through his glass to see where the last shot came from.

"Tom—Tom—see broad off the quarter that craft edging up through the fog. Cut away some of her spars, or we're in a fix!"

The old man slewed his gun, got it sighted to suit him, and just as a shot from that direction skimmed the water near enough the stern to splash spray on board sent in his messenger.

"She is hit—she is hit! Give her another, Tom—all our danger lays there!" cried Harry, keeping his glass on the enemy.

The ships to windward, now in full sight, were crowding sail, but Harry felt that he had the heels of them, if his spars were not crippled and the breeze held.

The fog was now almost gone on their lee quarter, and young Brent saw what a fearful danger he had escaped, if he only got away from his nearest antagonist.

He had, in escaping from the vessels first seen, headed right down on the fleet which was lying off the port of New York. A dozen or more ships-of-war were on his lee quarter now, all but one out of range. And she seemed to be an unwieldy craft, a huge three-decker under short sail at first, but now crowding on canvas and firing from her bow-guns.

"Fire for her spars, Tom—we're going three fathoms to her one—fire for her spars, and we may get out o' range before we're hit!"

It seemed impossible though, for the water was white around the schooner where the hissing shots from the enemy were striking.

The whole fleet could now be plainly seen; only three vessels, however, were in chase. The sloop-of-war first seen, white with canvas from truck to deck, was crowding all she could and almost in range, for she gained when the Red Gauntlet had to haul her wind and brace up, and the "74" astern was in range.

But suddenly her foremast was seen tottering, and all was confusion when it and her head-sails were all seen coming down over her bows.

"Glorious Tom Breeze! You've saved us now!" cried Harry, with a glad shout, and he grasped the grimy hand of the old gunner and kissed him before all the crew.

"Look out—look out, she'll kick hardest in the flurry!" cried Seth Coffin. "Bear away—bear away, quick, or she'll rake us fore and aft!"

He sprang to the wheel himself, and the schooner shot off almost at a right angle to her old course just as the entire broadside from three decks of the "74" came hissing along over the sea.

"You've a share in Tom's glory, Mr. Coffin!" gasped Harry, for the wake they had just left boiled with the seething shower of shot that came from the enemy.

Yet safe, though almost miraculously so, the Red Gauntlet sped on, and her old pilot, grim and pale, stood near the wheel watching the compass and the swelling sails, and the craft astern with alternating glances of hope and despair.

"Two hours o' this—if we can hold it—will put us safe in shoal water!" he said, in answer to an inquiring look from Harry.

The "74" seemed to give up the chase now and to have her hands full in repairing damages after the failure of her last broadside, and the privateer edging away yet more westerly, so as to save an angle of advantage which the British sloop-of-war was getting, increased her distance so far that the pivot gun Tom had worked so fast and well was allowed to cool.

"There's glory enough for a lifetime in this escape if we do get away," said Harry, who now began to breathe more freely. "We were in short range of guns enough to blow us all out of the water at one time."

"Fortune favoure ze brave. Zat you can see, mon capitaine," said the chevalier, who with his

marines under arms had been on deck from the very first sound of alarm.

An hour later, and only the sloop-of-war in chase, and she on the weather quarter, seemed to hold on, hoping something would occur to give her another chance at her old enemy—the one who had given her the first taste of cold iron on the American coast.

Her commander knew that the schooner was bearing down on a lee shore, and perhaps he thought that inshore, as is often the case, the wind would lose strength, while it held fresher outside, and thus he might bring his heavier batteries once more in play on a craft which had first put him to shame and again got away when actually under his guns.

By noon every English ship was out of sight except the sloop-of-war. The sand-hills of Long Island were in plain sight on the lee beam, and the schooner flew along close-hauled to the wind in water less than treble her own draught.

The Englishman, also hauled up on a wind, burying his lee guns, with royals aloft on each mast, was off about six miles on the weather quarter, and not gaining any, though if she lost, it was so little it could hardly be seen.

"I don't like to see that critter hang on so, captaining," said Seth, who had just come up from lunch with Harry, some time after noon.

And he pointed to the persistent sloop-of-war, holding her course so steadily.

"Why—we're slowly leaving her, and she could never take us alone. If it were not for the danger of losing a good many men, with no chance of profit, I'd fight her now, fair and square, yard-arm to yard-arm."

"It isn't her I'm thinking of, captaining. We're nearing Montauk fast, and if there should be a British fleet off that entrance to the Sound near enough for her to signal—we'd be worse off yet when we get there."

"What do you think of it, pilot?" asked young Brent.

"'Twill be well on to night afore we're off Montauk," said the latter. "If there's no enemy in gunshot afore then, I reckon we can creep in through the Gardiner's Island channel into the Sound. 'Twill never do to give up beat afore we are beat, after what we've seen to-day."

"That is so, pilot, and we'll still trust to our good fortune, while we keep a good lookout below and aloft. Ah!—the sloop-of-war is tacking off-shore."

"She had to, sir. We are inside of a shoal she couldn't weather. And we'll have smooth water for an hour, while she is pitching into a chop sea."

"So much the better for us then."

The sloop-of-war did not tack inshore again after standing off. She had evidently given up the chase as a waste of time and a trial of patience.

This just suited Harry Brent, who had been cogitating over a descent into Canadian waters and the chance of prize-taking off more northern shores where British men-of-war might be less plenty and transports and merchantmen more numerous.

As she stood off, he shortened sail and took matters easy until night set in. Then, boldly he stood out to sea, careless whether a fleet was lurking off Montauk or not, since he had no intention of keeping in near enough to the land now to fall in with blockaders.

The officers and crew were in high spirits. Their masterly escape from such a net-work of foes made them happy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MASKED NECK!

"GOSH all hemlock! I'm in a pickle! Two golden doubloons a'most burnin' a hole in my pocket, and, my soul, if I've got any bankerin' after five more that's promised, and I've agreed to earn 'em by peekin' into a gal's secrets. And how to do it without gettin' my head broke is the next question! What an all-fired fool I am! That good dinner, and the wine, and the sight of so much money just crazed me!"

These were the comments of Nicodemus Sparkle, when he reached the store, a half-hour over his usual time. As nothing was doing just then, his delay passed unnoticed.

But, he had not long been at his post—a desk near the front door—when Mr. Carroll Brent came out to the front, and seeing him disengaged, asked him if he had passed the lower market lately.

"I was down there to get a cup of coffee when I first turned out this morning, sir. I was on guard, first watch, and got tired and didn't sleep much. Gosh all hemlock—this war makes hard times though! Do you think 'twill last long, sir?"

"No—England has more of it on her hands than she wants and will give us an honorable peace soon or she'll lose Canada and her West India possessions. Did you see any soft-shell crabs in market?"

"Yes, sir—lots of 'em, and cords on cords of canvas-back too. The less money there is circulating, the more there is to spend it for. Gosh all hemlock—if I was only rich I'd live on canvas-back, partridge and soft-shell crabs!"

The merchant smiled.

"If you're not busy, just now, Sparkle, I wish you'd step down and order a couple of ducks and two or three dozen soft-shell sent up to my house. Here is the money to buy them with. I promised to see to it this morning when I left home and it slipped my mind till just now."

"I'll get 'em and carry 'em up myself, sir—can do it just as well as not, for there's nothing on the order-book this afternoon!"

"As you like. If there is any change left over, buy something for yourself!"

The merchant handed him some silver money, without counting it, and returned to his office.

"Gosh all hemlock—if she only comes to the door instead of the dicky, I may get a chance to peek at her neck when she turns around. If she's in evenin' dress, 'twill be low-necked, sure. If I get them five doubloons—I'll—I'll buy a new suit o' clothes that'll make her stare! Real broad-cloth—French at that!"

And Nicodemus Sparkle started off with an extra sand-piper gait.

Before he made his purchases he indulged in a pint of strong beer to gratify his nerves for future actions.

At the market he found the game and soft-shells, both prime and cheap, for home productions had come down while foreign goods went up and as the marketmen said—"money was money" and worth all it called for.

With the change left over, Nicodemus purchased a huge bouquet—the flowers were gorgeous, if not choice. This was for a peace offering at the shrine where he so long had vainly worshiped—he didn't know how much he might need it.

And now, on his way to the house, he studied out a half-dozen different plans to accomplish his object. One was to stumble against her as if by accident and trip her up. Then to lift her up and apologize and while doing it to manage to get a look at the place where the mark would be if she was the person the stranger supposed.

"She'll slap my face for being awkward. But I can stand that and more too from her pretty hand!" said Nicodemus to himself.

Just then, he saw a spider on the bouquet. It was but a little one, as the church member said about a slight prevarication, but it put a big idea into his shallow head.

What that idea was events were soon to show. He reached the house, went up the steps and knocked with an unusually gentle, but a very nervous hand.

As he hoped, Miss Lucille came to open the door.

"Mr. Brent sent up this marketing, Miss Lucille, and I took the liberty of buying a small bunch of flowers for you, miss; hope they'll not offend you!"

"Not in the least; you were kindly thoughtful, Mr. Sparkle!" she replied as she set the basket inside and raised the flowers to inhale their fragrance.

"Oh, mercy! Gosh all hemlock! There's a nasty spider on your neck! Let me brush it off—oh, dear, it will bite you—it's the p'ison kind!"

And as he screamed out the words, Sparkle danced around like a madman and before she knew it literally tore off her lace collar and a part of the back of her dress was torn apart.

"I've got it—I've got it! The horrible thing!" he cried, and he pretended to crush the spider under his foot as he stamped on the carpet.

"You idiot! You needn't tear half my clothes off to find a harmless spider. I never knew one to bite anybody! Take your old flowers, and yourself, too, out of the house in a hurry, or I'll call up old Combrey the coachman and have you kicked out!"

The girl was furious. She detested him, anyway, and to have him lay his rude hands on her person just on account of a poor spider, and to tear her collar and dress, made her too angry for expression.

Sparkle did not wait to offer excuses. He saw that he had started a storm no words of his would assuage.

So he put out on a run and he did not stop while in sight of the house. But as soon as the first spasm of terror wore off, he chuckled out:

"I knew 'twould make her mad. But I did it. And I saw the watermelon mark—it is there—just below her collar and between the shoulders! The five doubloons will be mine. She may tell Mr. Brent. If she does, he'll give me fits. But I'm seven doubloons ahead sure and I can stand 'most anything for that!"

He returned to the store, and the instant closing time came and he was released from duty he rushed around to Pell street to report to the dark-visaged man who had given the name of Doctor Rose.

He found the latter in his room and, almost breathless from his haste, dropped into the chair that was offered.

"I've seen it—it is there—big as a dollar, or bigger, red as fire on her lily-white neck!" he gasped.

"Ah! Then years of search have not been passed in vain. You are sure, man, you are sure?"

"Gosh all hemlock, yes! I had to tear her dress half down the back to see it, she fit so when I clawed about her neck, tellin' her a spider had got there from a bouquet I gave her. Oh,

Jerusalem! *wasn't* she mad! She'd have killed me if I hadn't run."

"She had no idea of your purpose?"

"Gosh all hemlock, no! How could she? I put it all on the spider, and you ought to have seen me stamp on the pesky thing when I told her I'd got it."

"You are ingenious. You'd make a smart man if you had the chance."

"Gosh all hemlock! Then I'd like to have a chance."

"You shall. I will have more work for you. If you do well for me, I will do better by you. There is the money I promised you."

Five more doubloons felt terribly heavy in the pocket of Nicodemus Sparkle. Yet he wanted them right there where he could feel them and realize they were *his*.

"What do you want me to do next?" asked Nicodemus.

"Nothing now! I wish to be alone. To realize that the work of weary years is drawing to a close. That hopes often thwarted will yet be fulfilled. When I want you, I know where to find you. You are outdoor clerk for Carroll Brent who has adopted this girl. I shall call to see him. But I shall be dressed better. And you must not know me then, or show by word or look you've ever seen me. If you *do*—beware! I can make your fortune, or I can mar it for life."

The stranger spoke sternly, almost fiercely, now. Nicodemus Sparkle trembled before those flashing eyes.

"Gosh all hemlock! Don't get mad with a chap afore he gives you cause," gasped the terrified clerk.

"I am not angry. When I am something besides words will show it. Go to your lodgings. When I need you I will pass your store and drop a blank piece of white paper. Then, when you can do so unobserved, come to this room."

"All right, sir. I'm your man as long as I live. Gosh all hemlock! I like to work where I'm paid as if I was somebody. I'll live to see the day yet when they'll write me down Nicodemus Sparkle, *Esquire*."

The stranger smiled—said:

"Remember—we are strangers everywhere but inside this room; and now, good-night."

Nicodemus took the hint and left. And that night he supped on cold canvas-back duck and hot oyster-soup with a Jamaica rum-punch for a night-cap.

CHAPTER XIX.

BANISHED FROM PARADISE.

"I WISH, papa—you'd never send that miserable ape, Sparkle, to this house again."

This was what came fast and furious from the lips of Lucille, when her father came home with the weekly paper in his hand, or, rather, an extra, just out with fresh war news head-lined.

"Why, Pet, what has he done to raise such a storm where I always find sunshine?"

"He said you sent him here with some marketing."

"Yes; I sent him to buy some, and he said he would bring it to the house."

"Well, sir, he did that, and to show off as usual, the nasty little beast, he brought a bouquet of hollyhocks and daisies, and when I took it, rather than to be unladylike, and thanked him, he said a spider was crawling on my neck, and he danced around like a madman and clawed off my collar and tore my dress and made me so mad I cried like a baby. I could have killed him, he acted so like a drunken fool, but he ran away. I don't want to see him *here* any more!"

"You shall not, dear—don't worry. And I'll blow him up roundly when I go to the store. I'd discharge him, but times are hard and the poor niny would have no place to go where he could make a living!"

"I don't ask you to discharge him, papa—only don't send the nuisance up here any more. I can't bear the sight of him. He always smirks and grins and tries to say something *smart*, which to him is impossible!"

"I'll see that he does not trouble you again. But I've news from our Harry. Do you not want to hear that?"

"Yes, papa—you *know* I do. Harry is just the bravest, dearest boy on earth! Has he been sinking a British frigate or firing into a ship of the line?"

"You little witch! You hardly thought in your *badinage* how near the truth you'd come. Hear me read this:

"Baltimore again ahead. The Red Privateer heard from. After safely running through the blockading fleet of English men-of-war in and off Chesapeake Bay, the Red Gauntlet, it appears, ran boldly up the coast to the northward. The captain of a fishing-smack running into New York saw her a few days ago caught almost in the center of the British fleet off Sandy Hook, the entrance to the port of New York. It was in a dense fog, and when it lifted she was in short range of the Poickers, a 74-gun ship.

"Most men in such a position would have hauled down their flag and surrendered, but the gallant young Captain Harry Brent, while making all sail to escape, opened a deliberate fire from his heavy pivot guns and cut away the fore-mast of the three-decker and actually ran out from under a fire of her three-decked broadside guns, and though chased by

the fastest vessels in the large squadron, escaped into shoal water and ran free and apparently unscathed out of fire. It seems miraculous and evinces a daring almost unparalleled in naval warfare.

"Mr. Carroll Brent has the congratulations of his townsmen on having his noble vessel so ably handled. We expect to hear yet greater things from the famous Red Privateer. She will prove a scourge to British commerce, we opine."

"Is that all, papa?"

"Yes, dear—is it not enough?"

"Yes, papa, for one day. Let us go to supper and let dear mamma hear the news. She, too, will rejoice that Harry has added another leaf to his laurel wreath. He'll astonish the world if Heaven preserves his life. He is almost too brave!"

"He is cool and full of nerve, my little girl. Doubtless he saw a chance to escape if he could quickly cripple the ship nearest to him, which must have been bows on since he cut away her foremast right on the start. I suppose she then broached to enough to fire the broadside which he escaped so wonderfully!"

They were now in the supper-room, and the whole account had to be read over to Mrs. Brent.

"Harry is too daring. He ought never to have got in among a fleet of war-vessels!"

"It was in the fog, the account says," replied her husband. "And in a foggy night one cannot see lights or anything else a ship's length away. Harry is a hero, and he is keeping close to the coast to cut off some of the transports which bring stores, pay and recruits to the fleets and armies of England sent to carry on this unjust and cruel war."

"We'll hear of Harry next bringing or sending in a prize or prizes to Boston or some Eastern port. He'll not make his a pleasure cruise!"

"No, indeed. If I was only a man I'd be with him!" said Lucille, earnestly.

"I reckon he is thankful you're not a man!" said Mr. Brent, smiling.

"Wife, your supper is delicious. These canvas-backs are done to a turn!" he added, as he tasted a mouthful of the brown and juicy meat.

"I knew how you liked them, dear, and saw to the cooking myself," she answered.

"I knew that by the flavor. You must give our dear Lucille lessons in the art."

"She has more skill in that line than you are aware of!" said Mrs. Brent, with a smile. "You men, immersed in business, never think we have cares of our own which make home more pleasant on your return. The salads you so often praise are always dressed by our Lucille. The tarts and preserves are her especial care."

"I am glad to know it," said the merchant.

"I am happy to listen to her music, to know that when peace returns and we realize our dreams of foreign travel she can talk in the language of the people we visit; but no lady should be ignorant of the details of household duties. If she is, she is at the mercy of servants. But come—let us enjoy some music in the parlor. Lucille, it will soothe your nerves, after the rude shock you received this afternoon."

CHAPTER XX.

A CLEVER CATCH.

THE night passed without any surprise or alarm after the Red Gauntlet stood out off the coast, and if any of the enemy were outside of Montauk or off the Vineyard, she missed them.

The next day, with a fresh northeast gale, her square sails all taken in and her yards braced up to the wind, single reef in fore and mainsail with bonnet off the jib, she headed up as near the wind as she could lay.

She was a beauty in a sea-way—her flaring bows rose to every sea, throwing the white foam to each side, and where many a craft would bury bows under and have her deck swept by incoming surges, she would ride over it all like a duck, dry and comfortable.

The gale so freshened by mid-day that another reef was taken in the mainsail and the foresail was lowered away and furled. The sea was high, but not lumpy, and even under this easy canvas the schooner made six or seven knots so close-hauled the leeches of her sails were kept shivering.

The land was seen on the lee bow and beam before night, and our young captain began to think of heading offshore on the other tack, when a lookout from aloft reported three vessels at anchor under the lee of a small island, which the pilot said was an offset from Nantucket.

A look from aloft through the glass revealed two heavy brigs, anchored close together, and further in, near shore, a large topsail schooner, taut and rakish in look and rig.

"Mr. Coffin, come up here, please, and take a squint at those vessels through the glass from the fore-yard!" cried our hero, from his perch aloft.

The first officer was not so agile as his young leader, but he was soon on the yard.

Long and very deliberately he looked each vessel over. They were not over four or at most five miles away, and the glass enabled a pretty accurate examination.

"The brigs are English, deep loaded. The

schooner looks man-o'-warrish—she has colors flyin', but I can't make 'em out the way she lays, almost head to us, trending to tide, I calculate. If she is American, they're transports and her prizes. If not—they're transports anyway, and she is their convoy!"

"If so—she'll see *fun* before morning. I don't think she is any heavier than we are, and we're so handy to either Boston or New London, it will be easy to run prizes in!"

"Yes, captin, when they're *taken*. These John Bull transports are apt to carry some guns and to go heavy-handed, and they'll fight if they have good backing."

"True—we'll have to use strategy. I'm going to hoist English colors and run in and anchor as near the transports as I can. That will leave the schooner, I should judge, near a gunshot to leeward where she lays. If she is American, we'll soon know it and can shift our flag!"

"Yes, captin. Jest as you say! I've got done having much opinion of my own, for you're about right in whatever you do all the time!"

Harry smiled, and with everything ready for action and the English flag flying from his gaff, he stood in, slowly, toward the anchorage, under reefed mainsail and jib, as if to get out of a heavy sea and bad weather.

There were signals sent up on the schooner when the Red Gauntlet rounded to just to windward of the nearest brig, but it was now twilight, too late to see them.

"Brig ahoy! What brig and where from?" asked Harry, as he rounded to, took in sail and dropped a light anchor just on the weather beam of the brig.

"The Doboy—from Portsmouth, bound to the fleet under Admiral Amherst. What schooner is that?"

"The Nightingale, tender to the fleet. I'll send a boat aboard soon. I want some old porter if you have any. Who is your convoy?"

"The Lion—Lieutenant Parker—ten guns. She was taken off our coast three weeks before we sailed, and her Yankee crew sent to Dartmoor!"

"Good! I'll run down with a boat and see my old friend Parker."

"We'll take him word—I'm just going to send a boat on board, with some wine he ordered when he came to."

"All right!" cried Harry, thinking *perhaps* he had "a soft snap" ahead.

Now, in all haste, the young captain called all his officers in and revealed the plan of action he had formed at the instant.

He would board and quietly seize the first transport with one officer and a fully-armed boat, then board and take the other with a second boat, if it could be done. They seemed to have no suspicions, he had come in and anchored so boldly, flying their own flag. If this could be done, he had no fear but that he could cope with a ten-gun schooner, no matter how well she was manned.

Each officer sent to the brigs was ordered, the moment they had them secure, to up sail and bear away before the wind for the entrance to the Sound—New London or Newport being the handiest port to make. The boat which left the first transport would take a good part of the crew—it would go full-manned to pull against such a gale!

The men of the privateer had supper at dark, and knowing they had work ahead they made a short meal of it.

A half-hour later, fearing delay might lessen the chance of success, the first cutter, with twenty good men—eight at the oars and twelve covered with tarpaulins in the bottom of the boat, all well armed—Mr. Coffin in charge, pulled for the leeward brig. Ten minutes later, Mr. Nettles, with the same number of men in the second cutter, pulled for the first brig.

It was dark, but each vessel carried a signal light at her gaff and there was no trouble in seeing where they lay.

Harry had now shortened his own crew by forty men and two good officers, but his daring soul did not weaken at the thought that he might soon be in action with more men than he had left.

The story would soon be told. If the brigs were captured without alarm, the schooner might in turn be surprised. She had anchored far to leeward, where she could send boats to forage on the mainland—a very constant habit of British cruisers in those days.

Harry omitted no precaution. He had a stepper on his cable, the anchor was buoyed, and he was ready to slip in a second. His batteries were all double-shotted. Sails loose and ready to run up and even his grappling-irons in the fore and main chains, if it became necessary to run down, grapple and board the war-schooner if her commander got an idea of what was occurring to windward.

Both brigs seemed to have been boarded and at the same moment, judging from the time their signal lights came down, for without a sound of gun or pistol both lights were lowered within twenty minutes from the time her boats left the Red Gauntlet.

"The brigs are curs!" said Harry, with a sigh

of relief, and to keep up the idea that the brigs were still at anchor, he had one light hoisted in his main-topmast cross-trees and another at the end of the flying jib-boom. Thus three lights could yet be seen from the schooner to leeward.

Watching closely, by ear as well as eyesight, Harry soon learned that both brigs had slipped their cables and were slipping off before the gale to the southward.

"They're safe, anyway!" he said to old Tom Breeze, who stood by his side, aft. "They'll be in the Sound by daylight, for both Nettles and Coffin are old coasters and know the way in!"

"Yes—mon brave capitaine—ze John Bull men 'ave receive one gran' surprise!" said the chevalier, who heard the remark, as fully armed and accoutered he stood near.

"Hark—was not that the dash of oars?" asked the old gunner. "I reckon the brig's boat is coming back!"

"They're men-o'-war's-men! Hear that click in the metal row-locks, as if but a single oar struck them!" said Harry, in a low tone. "'Tis a boat from the man-of-war schooner—look out!"

"Boat ahoy! What boat is that?" shouted the lookout from the Red Gauntlet.

"Lieutenant-Commanding Parker, in his gig, from His Majesty's schooner Lion!" was the answer, as the boat lay still, her oars at rest.

"All right, come aboard! Glad to see you, sir!" shouted Harry, himself, and added:

"Man the side there and pass the man-rope!"

The next minute the English boat was alongside and an officer in neat, undress uniform, but little older than Harry, sprung on board. He wore only his sword, he thought he was visiting a friendly vessel.

"Welcome, sir—walk below!" said Harry, as he motioned to Tom Breeze to look to the boat's crew.

And he turned to the companionway leading to the cabin.

The officer seemed surprised to see everybody under arms, but he followed Harry, while Tom Breeze, in a hearty tone, hailed the men in the boat:

"Come aboard, lads! You've had a hard pull head to wind!"

The English lieutenant descended into the cabin, and as he took a seat, asked:

"Did you leave my father, captain of the Agamemnon, well in the fleet? He is second to the admiral!"

"I left the fleet in such a hurry I had no time to ask after his health!" said Harry, with a quiet smile. "May I trouble you to lay aside your sword, Lieutenant Parker? You will not need it for some time!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the English officer, in surprise.

"That you are a prisoner to Captain Harry Brent, of the American Privateer Red Gauntlet!" was the reply. "Hold, sir!—you need not offer to show resistance. A hundred armed men are on my decks; your boat's crew is secured, as your own ears can testify, and, you are best off to submit quietly and be treated more as a guest than a prisoner!"

"Holy St. George! Was there ever anything like this? Captain Potter came aboard the Lion and reported you as just in the Nightingale, tender to our fleet!"

"They weren't very tender to me when I was under their fire a few hours ago," said Harry. "Again let me ask you for your sword in the most respectful manner."

"I cannot help myself, or I would," said the officer, sadly, as he unbuckled his belt and laid his sword on the cabin table.

He had heard a brief struggle on deck, and knew his boat's crew had been captured.

Thus the commander of the British war schooner and eight of her men were captured.

Harry now had wine and food brought out, and introducing captain, the Chevalier Duval, to his "guest," as he termed Lieutenant Parker, left him to entertain the latter, knowing well that he would take good care of him.

He went on deck and forward, where he interviewed and closely questioned the coxswain of the English gig.

From him he learned that two boats had been sent off to the mainland on a foraging expedition for fresh provisions. This left but about thirty men all told on the British schooner, and they thoughtless of danger.

Harry instantly laid his plan of action. Leaving his new-made prisoners under strict guard, he decided to man the English gig, under his own charge, with his best serviceable boat full of men, and to surprise the English schooner where she lay.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOO MUCH FOR THE ENGLISHMAN.

To think and to act were one with him.

In a few minutes, leaving his third officer in command on board, with orders to slip his cable and run down if heavy guns revealed that the English schooner could not be surprised, he pushed off with twenty picked men in his two boats.

It was a fearfully daring adventure. But success had made our hero fearless. Heading

for the dim light far to leeward, he steered for the schooner which was now less than half-manned, if none of her boats had returned.

He led, his second boat a few oars' length astern of the English gig.

When they neared the English schooner the usual hail "Boat, ahoy!" rung out sharp and clear.

"Lion—PARKER!" was the answer.

"Lights at the gangway; captain coming on board!" was heard from the schooner.

A minute later the "captain" was on board. But it was Captain Brent, of the Red Gauntlet, instead of Parker, and an armed body of Americans held the surprised Britishers at bay, while they took complete possession of the Lion.

Young Brent did not waste a moment. He did not know how soon the armed boats which had been sent to the mainland might return.

Securing his prisoners, he slipped the cable, for the schooner lay at single anchor—got her under way under mainsail and jib, and beat up to the other anchorage.

While doing this he overhauled a boat containing the captain and six of the crew of the transport Doboy, who were drifting about looking for their brig.

A more astonished set of Englishmen, taking them all around, probably never lived. They had honestly believed the schooner they had seen coming in so boldly for shelter at the same anchorage to be English, and had not the least idea of peril until they were captives.

It was so near dawn when Harry Brent got back alongside his own vessel with his prize, that he anchored within pistol-shot, so as to pick a prize crew before following in the wake of his captured brigs.

"I think we'd better get where we can get help to take care of what we've got before we look for any more. Don't you, Master Harry?" asked Tom Breeze, when the latter spoke of the Lion's boats yet ashore.

"Yes. You will take command of the prize and follow me in. There are fifteen of our men on board now—take ten with you," said Harry. "The sooner we are in our own waters inside of Long Island Sound the happier I will be."

Just as the sun was rising the Red Gauntlet, with her prize a cable's length on her lee beam, stood down the coast in the same direction the brigs had been ordered to take.

The wind yet fresh from the northeast drove both vessels swiftly on.

Moody and unhappy, young Parker, the son of the heroic admiral of that name who distinguished himself off Fort Moultrie, in 1777, stood by the side of young Brent and looked at the vessel so lately under his command.

"I am disgraced forever," he said, to Harry. "I have allowed a mere boy, for such you are in age, to capture two transports under my convoy and to take my own vessel, and not a blow struck in their defense! I shall never dare to look my father in the face again."

"You must not feel so," said Harry. "Strategy alone conquered you. You have lost nothing in honor. Had I no interests but my own at stake I'd do no more than the fair thing by you. I'd put you on your craft, full-manned, and give you a fair fight. But mine is a privateer, and I have an owner and a large crew to satisfy. As it is—the moment we are in port, you are free on parole, yourself and officers, free to go to your people in Canada or to be exchanged from our nearest naval station for prisoners taken by your vessels."

"You are generous as you are brave," said the young Englishman. "No one but a very brave man would have run the risk you did. Each of those brigs carried thirty men and six guns, and if they had not been surprised, would have showed a tough resistance. You know as well as I that we English fight when we have a chance."

"Yes, indeed," said Harry, laughing. "And that was the reason I tried to catch you without a chance. I will report when I get in that you were taken by surprise entirely."

"Thank you. That will better my case but little. The first question asked by my superiors will be how were you so infernally stupid as to let this Yankee surprise and capture first your convoy and then yourself? I have but one answer. I knew our fleets in force held all this coast, and I did not believe a Yankee ship floated outside Yankee harbors."

"There is where you err," said Harry. "My father, Commodore Brent, has a fleet of four men-of-war under him now on the ocean. I do not exactly know where, but I'll guarantee in fighting-trim somewhere! Less than three days ago I passed the U. S. brig-of-war Argus, bound on a cruise along your own British coasts. We have more vessels on the sea than you think, and men in them who know how to sail and fight them too! What do you think of this vessel escaping from the center of your fleet off New York bay when caught in a fog? She was almost in pistol-shot of a '74' before I knew it!"

"I think it impossible," said young Parker. "Yet it is true, and I cut the foremast out of that '74,' dodged a broadside from her three decks, and got away after an all-day chase from their best ships!"

"Then there is no dishonor in my present position!" said Parker. "When my father knows that you are my conqueror he'll simply acknowledge that I've met a Tartar!"

They had breakfast and then made all the sail both vessels could carry, for Harry was anxious to close with the brigs, so all could go into port in company.

They had run in close to the coast, as close as they could with safety, for the nearer in they were the smoother the water, covered by reefs to windward, and the better way they made.

The light-house on Montauk gleamed up white on his starboard bow when Harry took his glass and went aloft to see if the brigs were in sight.

He reached the fore-yard and adjusted the glass. Both brigs were in sight—they had rounded the Cape and were inside.

But Harry saw another sight he did not like so well. On his weather bow, heading for the channel by which he must enter, was a full-rigged ship, and he thought the moment his eyes centered on her spars, he had seen her before.

It was his old enemy, the sloop-of-war Owl, the same which had tackled him first off the Capes of Virginia and so recently chased him up the coast.

"She is alone, thank Heaven!" he muttered, and hurrying below to the deck, he ordered all his prisoners below and cleared, boldly, for action.

"Tom," he shouted to Breeze, on the other schooner, "keep right on and run in—I'll take care of this craft."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOT WORK AND GLORY.

"Not much!" muttered Tom, to himself, for he had already seen and recognized their old enemy. "There's a time to obey orders, and there's another when 'twould be cowardly to do it, and I reckon that time has come!"

And he began to look sharply over the armament of his command. She carried ten guns, eight broadside and two long twenty-fours, and he soon looked up the ammunition for the latter.

Harry, fearfully short-handed to handle his vessel in action, was not going to lose his prize and his own schooner while he could fire a gun to save them. He could not enter the channel now close under his lee without running under fire of the sloop-of-war. He had no thought of deserting his prizes and trying as before to escape the British man-of-war, heavy as she was.

He went below to put on his sword and pistols which he had laid aside at breakfast-time.

"Captain Brent, will you dome a great favor?" said young Parker, as he saw the former calmly arming himself.

"Certainly, sir, anything consistent with my duty!"

"Permit me to go on deck to witness your gallantry. I see you are determined to fight a vessel double your tonnage and thrice your force at least. I give my honor not by word or sign to do anything that can aid your opponent or injure your chances—but I do wish to see a brave man fight his ship when the chances look so dark against him!"

"You flatter me, sir; but I take your word, and cheerfully grant the permission you ask. I only pray you will not get hurt, for I think we'll have hot work before it is all over!"

"I'll take my risks, for 'twill not be the first time I've been under fire."

"How is the tide, pilot?" asked Harry of his old coast pilot when he reached the deck.

"The last of flood nearly, I think, sir—it will soon be ebb. I'll hug this weather shore, if you please, and while we're in shoalish water we'll not feel it so much if you're goin' in when the ebb makes."

"You're right, sir. Take the helm and look to the sails. I'll have my hands full at the guns, I reckon."

It was a grand sight now. The sloop-of-war had got into a good position on the lee bow of the schooner, where the latter must pass in broadside range if she went by, and lay with her maintopsail aback, waiting.

The prize, just to windward and a little astern of the Red Gauntlet, stood on under her fore and mainsail and jib, and the square foretop-sail.

The Red Gauntlet held her way prettily under mainsail, foresail and jib—her square sails furled.

Harry personally saw every gun shotted—his favorite chain shot in the two pivots. He had only men enough to man one broadside at a time, leaving the sail trimmers to their duty.

As they neared the English ship the latter seemed willing to give Harry a chance to surrender without fighting, for he fired an unshot-gun to leeward.

Harry, who had been busy sighting and training his bow pivot gun, now sent up the Red Gauntlet burgee forward and sent in his first card.

"Well aimed, but a trifle too high," said Lieutenant Parker, who saw that the shot had torn a huge hole through the lee side of the sloop's maintopsail.

Harry ordered the crew of the gun to load and ran to his after pivot, which he could fire as he drew ahead by luffing a little.

"That is better. You made the splinters fly

then," said Parker, as the next shot tore through the bulwarks of the sloop.

The next instant, gun after gun, as they came to bear, of the sloop-of-war opened fire.

"*Sacré!* Zey mean business," cried the chevalier, throwing off his coat and jumping forward to help the crew of the pivot gun.

Three of his men in range were cut down by a single round shot.

Another struck the bow rail of the schooner, and a half-dozen men were wounded by splinters, among them Lieutenant Parker, whose right arm received a bad cut.

Wringing a handkerchief around it, he never left the deck, but simply saying, "It is getting warm, Captain Brent," stood and watched Harry, as the latter shouted to the men at the after pivot:

"Fire low! Let her have it between wind and water! To the larboard broadside there—fire as your guns bear!"

The action was fairly and hotly opened now. Suddenly a crashing sound opened on their ears that came from amid the smoke just astern.

"Thunder! The Lion is getting in her work," cried Parker, in surprise. "Your opponent will have her hands full, if she don't settle matters soon."

"Glorious Tom Breeze. He'll save us yet!" cried Harry, as another broadside from the sloop-of-war tore through his lower sails and rigging, while one of Tom's shots cut away the maintopmast of the sloop-of-war and left the topsail and all its hamper hanging between the fore and mainmast.

"Pelt away, men—pelt away. Fire for her decks every shot!" he shouted to his men.

The sloop-of-war now put up her helm to change her position and the Red Gauntlet drawing ahead got her broadside guns well at work. Tom Breeze from the Lion fired slowly, but his every shot took effect.

He had been hit several times in spars and sails, as Harry could see. What his damage on deck was could not now be known.

Harry, twice slightly wounded, had to order the brave Parker carried below when the latter received a severe wound in the leg so he could no longer stand.

"Fight on—you're too brave to be whipped!" cried the lieutenant, as they carried him down.

"We may sink—but we will never give up," was Harry's reply.

"They're working the pumps on the sloop of-war—you've let water into her, sir!" cried one of the men, a minute after.

"Keep up our fire—shoot low and hull her every time!" cried Harry, for he too saw the water, and it red with blood, running from the scuppers of his antagonist.

"She bears away, sir; she has got enough—and so have I!" cried the pilot.

A groan broke from his lips with the last word, for a shot taking a spoke from the wheel he held took a part of his arm with it, and he staggered bleeding over against the tailrail.

Another man sprung to the wheel, and Harry was glad enough to see the sloop-of-war making sail and taking advantage of the flood tide to draw off-shore and get out of action.

"Oh! if I was only full-handed now—I'd sink or capture her!" said Harry.

And he almost wept as he drew away from his disabled enemy.

But he had got enough. Two round shot in his foremast had so weakened it that the carpenter feared it would go by the board, even with the little sail he had left on her. Half of his present crew were dead or disabled. The Chevalier Duval had been twice wounded, but would not leave the deck while the battle continued. Then only he went below to take his turn where the busy surgeons were at work.

Harry hailed the Lion as soon as he could, and learned that the English surgeon, though a prisoner, was nobly attending to the wounded there.

Harry Brent, though hurt, did not leave his post on deck until the schooners were both well into the Sound and the sloop-of-war which they had so gallantly beaten off was nearly hull-down outside.

He found young Parker in a cot in the cabin, and the first words the latter said were:

"Thank God, you've lived through it, Captain Brent. Were you an Englishman the king would confer knighthood on you for such gallantry. You ought to be made a commodore for this."

"I'll reach that rank if I live," said Harry. "I'm sorry you are hurt."

"It was worth worse wounds than these to see such fighting," said the brave and generous officer. "My superiors will not blame me so much now. Have you many of your crew hurt?"

"Over one-half were killed and wounded before the sloop-of-war gave up and drew off. I'd have taken her if I had all my men with me. Over half my original crew are in my prizes."

"It is wonderful! I thought we English were bull-dogs in a fight—but you leave us clear out of sight."

Harry now had his wounds, scratches he called them, looked to, and then he went around to cheer his wounded men.

The pilot, though his arm had to be taken off close to the shoulder, bore up nobly and told Harry, while suffering, just how to steer to follow the brigs into New London.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YOUNG HERO ASHORE.

THE sun was low in the western sky when the Red Gauntlet, with the Lion close astern, stood into New London harbor. Her damaged mast would barely stand the strain of the jib and forward sail, and Harry Brent was more than pleased that it stood up till he got in, for it was badly cut away by the shot from the sloop-of-war.

The transport brigs were already anchored before the town, and pealing bells and cheering crowds told that the news of the capture of three prizes and the escape of the daring privateer from a far superior force, had got abroad.

Boats were alongside loaded with town officials, extending courtesies, before the sails were furled, and a couple of naval vessels, the brig Pelican and the sloop-of-war Hornet, just fitting out but not yet ready for sea, fired salutes in honor of the victor.

The wounded were at once removed to a hospital on shore, and the prisoners received and taken charge of by the naval force at the port, to be held till exchanged for United States seamen and officers held by the enemy.

This enabled Harry Brent to get his own officers and crew back on board his own vessel where they were so much needed.

That night, weak and worn down, our hero rested, but the dawn of another day found him busy. He had to report the recapture of the schooner Lion to the Government, also to turn over to the prize commissioners for appraisal and sale the prize brigs and their valuable cargoes—also to report his captures and the damages he had received and the men lost to his uncle, Carroll Brent.

These were official duties and were the first attended to. The report forwarded to Washington was sent by special courier, for the mails of that day were slow and uncertain, and the naval and military reports were generally forwarded by messenger.

Harry Brent did not forget a letter to his fair cousin, Lucille, which he inclosed to his uncle, and in it he expressed his fear that some peril was overshadowing her, telling her of the strange dream, the influence of which was too strong to be shaken off.

Though the people of the town extended every honor they could to young Brent and his officers, no flatteries could draw them from immediately necessary duties. A new foremast had to replace that nearly cut down in the engagement off Montauk, many repairs had to be made, men recruited to fill the place of the dead and wounded, new supplies of powder and shot laid in, their stores and water filled up and all made ready to resume their cruise.

Harry was hurried in all this, for he feared a more strict blockade would be kept outside to prevent his getting to sea, and he did not wish to tarry in port. He had planned a descent on the Canadian coast, and his heart burned with an eager desire to add to the conquests already made. The sooner he got off again, the less likely would it be that the blockade would be strong enough to keep him from getting out. For it would not be supposed he could so soon repair damages.

The facilities for repairs were not as great in that port as they would have been in New York or Boston, but they had to be taken, for the schooner was too much disabled to risk any further trials at sea till she had a new foremast stepped and rigged.

Seven or eight days at least would be occupied, and Harry hoped by that time to get answers to the letters he had sent to Washington and Baltimore.

Seth Coffin and Josh Nettles were well acquainted in the port and received their full share of honor and attention; but they, like their young captain, took pride in getting ready for yet greater exploits and attended to their duties in preference to accepting the many courteous invitations to fêtes and festivals given in their honor ashore.

The new recruits were put to drill, the old hands kept up in exercise, and nothing left undone to get the privateer and her crew ready for work when she again took to blue water.

Reports of outrages from British marauders all along the coast kept coming in, and Harry Brent longed to do his share in punishing the invaders and teaching them, by the law of reprisal, lessons they would have cause to remember.

On the tenth day after he dropped anchor in New London, Captain Harry Brent received the official thanks of the President for his daring and faithful service to the country in the restoration of the Lion to service and the capture of the transports of the enemy.

In due time the Government would see himself and crew amply rewarded for the service performed. And if Captain Brent preferred a regular to a privateer's commission, the Red Gauntlet would be purchased and enrolled in

the regular navy if her owner would consent to it.

Harry did not ask his officers if they had any choice in this matter, but at once decided to reply that he preferred his independence of action as a privateersman, and would so remain.

The two letters from Baltimore—one from his uncle, the other from Lucille—interested him most. Both were full of praise and love, and that of his uncle especially full of commendation of his conduct and joy over his success.

Lucille said she, too, had been dreaming had dreams, but she knew of no special peril hanging over her. She would be on her guard. She had been annoyed—however—she would perhaps tell him in her next letter the cause of her annoyance.

It had not yet taken the tangible shape which made it necessary to speak of it more particularly.

Harry was wondering what this could be, when his first officer reported the schooner ready for her next cruise in every respect.

Harry took time to write a brief answer to the letters just received, and then he, too, was ready for sea.

Pilot-boats sent out as far as Montauk reported several British men-of-war cruising outside, but thought with a good wind and a dark night the schooner could get to sea, since the enemy kept well outside and did not risk a close approach to the dangerous shoals and currents near the Point.

So the Red Gauntlet ran out into the Sound and anchored inside of Gardiner's Island to wait for such a wind and night as would best serve her in an attempt to run out and clear of the coast.

Once fairly at sea, Harry felt no fear but he could take care of his craft, for he had never yet met her equal in speed or weatherly qualities.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT MYSTERIOUS STRANGER AGAIN.

"GOSH all hemlock! Can it be the same man?" muttered Nicodemus Sparkle, as he saw a tall, finely-dressed person, of distinguished look and bearing pass the store where he was checking off a bill of goods to the truckman who loaded them.

The stranger had looked him squarely in the face, and the clerk remembered the dark, flashing eyes which he had twice encountered before.

The change in dress and a certain lofty and rather haughty style, made the difference now, and it startled him. He hardly knew what to say when this man turned back after passing and came directly up to him, and said, in a chilling way:

"You seem to be employed here. Can you tell me if the merchant, Mr. Carroll Brent, is in his office?"

"He is, sir," said Nicodemus, remembering the injunctions given him not to recognize this person if he met him again in the presence of others.

"I'll thank you to hand him my card, and to say when he is at leisure I desire to wait upon him with some letters of introduction."

Nicodemus bowed very low, took the card, and on his way to the counting-room hurriedly read the name on it.

It was:

"CAPTAIN LE CLARE,

"*Martinique.*"

The merchant was reading some correspondence just received by mail when the card was laid before him by his obsequious clerk, with the remark:

"The gentleman told me to tell you he had some letters of introduction to present when you had time to see him."

"Le Clare? A new name to me," said Mr. Brent, as he glanced at the card. "I am not very busy. Ask him to come in, Mr. Sparkle."

"Le Clare, a new name to Doctor Rose, too, I guess," said Sparkle to himself, as he hurried back.

"Mr. Brent will see Captain Le Clare—you will find him in his counting-room, straight ahead," said the clerk, his little eyes twinkling when he spoke, for he felt curious about the mystery of this man's second appearance and what this visit indicated.

The visitor paid no further attention to the clerk, but strode boldly to the counting-room, opened the door, and as he entered closed it behind him.

This did not exactly suit Sparkle, who tiptoed along toward the counting-room, to try to hear what the stranger had to say. He dared not enter the room without having some business there, and it was risky to listen at the key-hole, for if detected he would lose his situation in a hurry.

The stranger did not hold a very long interview with Mr. Brent, but when he came out ten minutes later, the merchant escorted him to the front door in a very friendly and respectful way.

At the door, as Captain Le Clare stood ready to depart, Mr. Brent said:

"I can only repeat what I said, captain, anything I can do to advance your interests,

personal, or in business, shall be done. It is a poor time to invest capital here now, for this war craze has put a damper on trade. But I'll see my friends and advise you further. By the way, do me the honor to dine at my house on Calvert street with me at three to-morrow."

"With sincere pleasure, Mr. Brent!" said his visitor, bowing low. "Should you have an hour of leisure this evening, I should be happy to meet you at my hotel!"

And again bowing in a stately way the stranger passed on down the street.

The merchant went back to his counting-room.

"Gosh all hemlock! I'd like to know what kind o' game that man is playing?" He'll be makin' up to Miss Lucille, I bet, and he is old enough to be her father. If she cared a hoot for me, I'd see what he wanted? But she don't care no more for me than she does for the yellow dog! Let the pirate or whatever he may be work—what is it to me, if I get my pockets lined? But I'd like to know the game, just for my own satisfaction. Maybe he'll let me into it, if I keep quiet. I don't dare do otherwise!"

Mr. Carroll Brent went home earlier than usual that evening. His wife and Lucille noticed it with pleasure. His business hours kept him away from home so much, they had but little of his company except at meals and in the evening after his late supper.

"I had a singular visitor to-day at the office," he said. "A Captain Le Clare, who at present hails from Martinique as his home, though he has lived in France, England, Spain and Germany—seen service abroad and a great deal of travel. He lately inherited a large fortune and has come to this country to make investments. He has letters of credence from our consul at Martinique and other men of mark abroad and is withal a gentleman of such good breeding and so intelligent and courtly in manner that I took quite an interest in him!"

"Is he a young man?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"In the prime of life—about forty years, I should judge. Tall and stately in form, with a weather-bronzed face and bright, sparkling eyes, black as jet!"

"Why, papa, he may be a prince in disguise."

"Hardly, child. He seems too much in love with our free institutions. He believed in a republic of the people—not a monarchy, which is but another name for tyranny, as we have learned to our own cost. You will have a chance to see what he is like. I have asked him to dine with us to-morrow. I will do my own marketing in the morning!"

"Don't send that puppy Sparkle up with it! I'll set the watch-dog on him if you do!" cried Lucille, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"No danger of his coming! I told him his life would be in danger if he ever crossed your path again!"

"Hal! What is that? Another alarm?" cried Mrs. Brent. "The bells are ringing and I hear people shouting!"

"I will go out and see!" said her husband.

He was gone but a little while. When he returned his face was aglow with excitement and pleasure.

"News from our hero again!" he said. "A mounted courier has just passed through the city on his way to Washington. He told the news, when he stopped to change horses, which will come to us by mail I suppose. The Red Gauntlet, off the coast near Montauk Point, captured two British armed transports, and recaptured the American war-schooner *Lion*, recently taken by the British. While taking her prizes to New London she was attacked by a British sloop-of-war, but beat her off with heavy loss on both sides!"

"Is Harry hurt?" asked Lucille, almost in tears.

"I could get no further particulars—they will reach us by mail; but he must be all right, for the courier said he brought his vessel and all three prizes into New London."

"Oh, dear, papa, why didn't he send a courier to us. It is so hard to wait for the slow mail. I shall not sleep till I know whether he has come out unhurt from such battles as he must have fought. An armed schooner and two armed transports captured, and a sloop-of-war beaten off!"

"It is the report, and the people are wild with joy over the news. Our navy, too, is at work—it is said one of our frigates has captured a heavier ship of the same class off the Capes. At least the engagement was seen by a coaster, and at the close our flag floated over both vessels. Their names have not been learned yet."

"The God of Battles and the Friend of Freedom are with us!" said Mrs. Brent. "I think this cruel and unjust war will soon be over."

"Harry will make his fortune and mine if he keeps on the way he has started," said the merchant.

"Such success in one so young is wonderful; but I felt when I gave him that command that he would do credit to it."

"He is the bravest, dearest man on earth," said Lucille, her dark eyes all aglow with enthusiastic fire. "I wish he was my *real* cousin and I your own *real* daughter with your own proud blood in my veins."

"Dear child, it may be better for your happiness that you are what you are. When marriage comes, I do not believe in close blood relations coming together."

"Marriage, papa! What do you mean?" gasped Lucille.

"Why, I thought my little Pet loved Harry Brent! And, dear, *true* love generally ends in marriage, does it not?"

"In novels, papa. I love cousin Harry—a little, I do believe. But neither by word of mouth nor in two letters has he ever hinted that he loves me. And I have too much pride in my nature to send my love a-begging! So we will talk of something else, if you please."

"As you like, Pet. Perhaps this 'prince in disguise' may take your fancy."

"Never, papa. I don't like dark-eyed men. The prettiest point in our Harry's looks is his expressive blue eye. Dark-eyed persons are hot in temper, jealous by nature, unfaithful. Blue-eyed people are generous, loving, true. Young as I am, I have studied the people I have met and formed this theory."

"Which is unjust to yourself, my dark-eyed daughter. Surely a more generous and loving child never existed than you."

"If there is any good in me, papa, it is all owing to the kind and tender way in which you and mamma have brought me up. Taking me, a helpless infant, into your care, you have never crossed my will, and by your love and good example toned down a nature which I know to be willful and impetuous. So my theory does not fail, if I am not a wicked example, for you and mamma must take credit for having changed my nature."

The merchant smiled and Mrs. Brent looked pleased.

"You have always been a good and dutiful child," said the latter. "A little given to have your own way, I acknowledge, but as it is generally the right way, we are satisfied."

CHAPTER XXV.

NEWS AHOY!—THE GUEST.

An hour before dinner-time next day, Mr. Brent received his expected Northern mail. The instant he found a letter within his own directed to Lucille, he called for the porter and sent it up to Calvert street by him.

"Gosh all hemlock—my chances are all gone!" groaned Nicodemus Sparkle, when the porter in passing out reported where he was going.

"I never had a tree or flower
That didn't wither and decay,
Or for one single happy hour
Could drive my evil luck away!"

"If that isn't poetry, it's truth!"

And the poor fellow sighed as he felt the weight of seven doubloons safe inside his pocket in a buckskin purse.

The merchant hurriedly read his letters and then hastened home, for the time was close at hand when he was to receive Captain Le Clare.

The latter called at the proper time, a half-hour before that set for dinner, so that he could be introduced as a guest to the family before the call to table.

His tall, well-molded form was dressed with studied elegance, yet with no extravagant display. No jewelry except an immense solitaire diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand was visible.

A narrow satin ribbon, black, crossed his white waistcoat, indicating that he wore a watch—but no seals of armorial cuts dangled below his fob—every part of his faultlessly-fitted apparel was rich but plain—only of the best material.

To the ladies, on being introduced he bowed low and with gentle courtesy—to Mr. Brent he was affable, but not familiar. His language was smooth and well chosen, he used no slang terms, nor were his remarks intrusive. He seemed more to listen than to talk, except when called upon by some remark especially addressed to him.

"We are quite a happy family to-day, captain!" said Mr. Brent. "We have received letters from my nephew who commands the *Red Gauntlet*."

"Ah—the *Red Privateer*! I have heard of her famous escapes and late captures!"

"She has been a lucky craft!" said Mr. Brent.

"Bravely handled, you mean, papa. I don't believe in *luck* as you call it. If Harry didn't know how to take care of and fight his ship well, no *luck* would give him success!"

"The young lady is right!" said the guest, bowing to her. "Courage and skill will defy evil fortune and succeed when fortune frowns most darkly!"

Lucille blushed. The dark, flashing eyes of that man burned with such strange intensity, when he addressed her.

At dinner, the daring escapes and recent successes of young Brent still formed the general theme of conversation.

The captain, though he acknowledged he had been a good deal at sea, left the burden of the talk to Mr. Brent, his reticence seeming to be natural, the result of diffidence or modesty.

"You must pardon any rudeness in my man-

ner," he said to Mrs. Brent. "I have led an active and adventurous life and have seen little of social and home life. I am more used to the boisterous ways of men than to the presence of fair and gentle women!"

"One would hardly suppose so, sir, from the fine manner you exhibit!" said the lady. "I am sure you will have no cause to make apologies here. We are plain and quiet people, unused to flattery, who try to live comfortably—no more than that. My husband is so immersed in business, that we give very little time to festivity or pleasure. We have looked forward to a time when we could lay aside business care and for the sake of our daughter enjoy a season of foreign travel and visit the places of interest to be found across the ocean. The war has *delayed* our plans—we hope not thwarted them!"

"Travel improves the mind of the young, which, fresh and vivid, takes impression from everything new that is seen!" said Captain Le Clare.

"Yes, and I know Lucille will enjoy all she sees. Hers is a happy disposition, and she takes in all that is worth having as she goes along!"

"A most happy nature!" said the guest.

Again his flashing eyes were bent on her face and her eyes drooped under the intensity of his look. And somehow—she knew not why—the thought of Harry's singular dream, as told in his letter then in her bosom, came vividly to her mind.

Could this urbane, almost handsome stranger be connected with any impending peril hanging over her? She liked to hear him talk, but when he looked in her face, it seemed as if some unspeakable fear entered her soul.

The dinner lasted quite late. There were several courses, oysters, soup, fish, meats and game, and it was lengthened as dinners of luxury should be, by pleasant talk.

Coffee was introduced at last, and the ladies excused, while Mr. Brent and his guest indulged in genuine Habanas, imported in the merchant's own vessels.

"Your daughter is very beautiful, but of an entirely different mold from your estimable lady!" said the captain, when the two gentlemen were alone.

"Yes, sir—she is an adopted child. We were childless, when a strange fortune threw this dear girl an infant into our hands. She has been reared by us and has never known any other love than that we have given her. Her mother died when she was not quite a year old, and she has no remembrance of her!"

"Has she no father?" asked the captain, and his dark eyes seemed to fairly pierce the face he looked into.

"No, sir; the father's violent death brought on the disease which carried the poor child's mother off. My wife and I, almost through accident, were present at her death-bed, and we received the infant at her hands, making death less terrible to her when we promised to care always for it and to rear it tenderly as our own. We have done so and never will forget our promise or yield up our *protégée*!"

"It is noble in both of you. But pardon the interest I take. I can hardly account for it. You said the father died by violence?"

"Yes—he was slain by a vindictive Indian in Upper Canada!"

"Ah! How sad. Was he a Canadian?"

"No, sir—an Englishman by birth, but long a resident in Canada. How long, I do not know myself. He was said to be the son of an English nobleman—but we had no opportunity to learn anything in regard to that. His papers were all burned, it was supposed, when his wife escaped with the babe in her arms from the building fired over his body!"

"Terrible! What a weird romance. It makes me sad to think of it. Yet the fair girl is fortunate in your joint protection and love!" said the captain, in a tone of deep feeling.

"It is a strange story, one we seldom allude to, and never in her presence!" said the merchant. "And now you will pardon me, for I have letters I must reply to by return mail, and I know you will accept the excuse!"

"Surely, yes. I, too, have business correspondence which needs my attention."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE HIGH SEAS ONCE MORE.

In a little bay, west of Gardiner's Island, almost hidden by trees on the bluff shores, the *Red Gauntlet* lay ready to put to sea the moment Harry Brent could see anything like a fair chance to get out. At the earliest moment when he had light to see, Harry went aloft, clear to his fore-royal yard, with his spy-glass, to scan the offing and see what he could.

Inshore, yet outside of the channel which led into the Sound, he saw three vessels—one seemed to be a heavy brig, the next a sloop-of-war, the third, outside of all, a frigate.

The three were so spread out that in the daytime it would be impossible to elude them without an engagement, and brave as he was, our hero was not foolhardy enough to think he could cope with a force that could fire twenty guns to his one.

Outside these three, under a press of sail and

standing in, came another vessel, as if intent on joining them.

"We're pretty closely blocked in!" he said to Seth Coffin, when he went on deck. "Our only chance will be a gale that blows the enemy off shore, or a dark, squally night when they'll have all they can do to take care of themselves without looking out for anybody else. There are four ships-of-war off the entrance to the Sound, and the least is as heavy as we are, while one is a double-tiered frigate!"

"Then we've nothin' to do but read the book o' Job and study patience, captin!" said the officer. "I'd like to be off, though, lookin' up somethin' more to take. I'm like a miser—the more we get, the more I want!"

"We can turn the men up to drill, after breakfast," said Harry.

"Sartingly, captin, and mightn't I send a small party in with the seine a-fishin', too? It looks as if some nice hauls could be made in on that low beach to starboard o' the pint of the bay. The more fish we have, the less beef and pork has to come from the hold, and fish is healthy for a change!"

"Certainly, Mr. Coffin. It is a good idea. And let one of the cooks bring off a load of that dry driftwood in one of the quarter-boats. It will save trenching on the galley stock below!"

The breakfast call sounded soon after, and breakfast was served to men and officers at the same hour, so that all could turn to duty at the same time.

Though he commanded a privateer, Harry Brent kept up man-of-war rules and a discipline as strict as that to which he had always been accustomed.

While the fishing party of one boat's crew were hauling the seine and another boat was bringing off some dry, well-seasoned firewood, Tom Breeze was putting his gunners through blank exercise at the guns, and the Chevalier Duval, equally alert, was giving a musket and pike drill on the forward deck.

Harry, passing from point to point, giving a word of praise where he saw it would do good, saw with pleasure the pride the men took in perfecting themselves in duty. He knew that every hour thus spent would give his men greater confidence in their vessel and themselves.

It is only the poorly-drilled and undisciplined force that is contemptible.

When the fishermen returned with a boat half full of large, delicious bay fish—rock, striped bass and others—the crew rejoiced, for every change from everyday diet adds to the health and comfort of a crew. Far too little thought of this is taken by many commanders in all kinds of service.

A couple of hours spent at drill was all that was required in the morning, and they were pleased when the order to break off was given.

"Have you perceive, mon capitaine, how ze men improve? Zey are willing and zey use zeir arm wiz ze skill of ze veteran. Ah, ha! it is to me one grand plaisir to instruct such men!"

"Ha! The boom of guns at sea! I wonder if this is the king's birthday? It sounds like a salute!" cried the young captain, as the dull sound of distant cannon came in on the light easterly breeze. "Steward, hand me my spy-glass. I'll go aloft and take another look outside."

The agile officer, with the glass slung at his back, was soon seen hurrying up to his perch on the lofty royal yard, from which he could look over the island and see what was going on outside.

At first he could not comprehend what he saw. The ship which he had seen outside under full sail was heading right in for the main channel that led into the Sound, with every sail set below and aloft and almost yard-arm and yard-arm the frigate he had seen next outside was exchanging what at first seemed to him to be a salute, but then it continued hot and fast and more like genuine broadside work.

He could not see the flag of either vessel, for they were coming bows on, but he saw that the English brig-of-war and the sloop were heading for the other two under a press of sail and their flags were plain in sight as they stood out.

Suddenly his glass sighted a blue swallow-tailed flag which seemed to have white spots in it at the main-trunk of the outside ship.

"It must be an American commodore," he said. "And he is fighting his way in, for there are ships astern of him, and like as not they're in chase."

"On deck, there! Get ready to slip the cable and make sail! Clear ship for action. If it is a United States ship she shall have help, no matter what the odds are!"

Sliding down to the deck swiftly the young officer was on his quarter-deck in a few seconds.

The men were already at their stations. "Aloft, topmen, loose away as fast as you reach the yards. Secure the boats, cast loose the guns and open the magazine. Up fore, mainsail and jib, and slip the cable to the anchor-buoy!"

The men had no idea what this all meant, but they obeyed every order fast as it was given.

Quickly every sail, even up to the fore-royal, was set, and the schooner, moving slowly at first, drew out from the bay and then, as she left the lee of the land, gathered headway and swiftly made her way out into the open channel, her colors flying from gaff and truck.

"Shot every gun and be ready to use them!" cried Harry. "Steer so as to engage that sloop-of-war lying athwart hawse of the vessel coming in. We'll give her a dose of iron that will astonish her when she least expects it!"

The two largest ships were very closely engaged, their sails almost hidden in the smoke that rose from their guns and Harry thought he could even hear the crash of shot as the ships came bowling down.

He was soon where his pivot-gun forward could get in its work, and carefully sighting the piece old Tom Breeze sent in his "best regards" as he said, in rapid succession, giving the sloop-of-war the first intimation that a new antagonist claimed her attention.

She and the brig-of-war had got into position to damage the incoming ship, a large ship, when suddenly, hauling up her courses, she luffed ship, revealing the United States flag at her gaff and poured a raking broadside into the brig which was nearest to her and heading off-shore sent the other broadside into the frigate in a most masterly style.

"Quick—bear away sharp and give the broadside guns and both pivots a chance. Let the sloop-of-war have all she wants!" shouted Harry.

As the schooner flew off and threw up her broadside to bear she trembled from truck to keelson under the combined discharge of every gun that would bear.

As the vessels were all now within less than a half-mile of each other, the guns did terrible work and the Red Gauntlet began to get some iron compliments returned by the sloop.

"Glory! GLORY! That is my father's frigate—the War Cloud, see how the old eagle puts in his work!" shouted Harry, for the first time recognizing the vessel so gallantly facing the enemies she no longer tried to escape.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DEAR-BROUGHT VICTORY.

THE ire of the old commodore on the War Cloud was up. He seemed to realize, too, who was helping him, and he scorned to put his helm up and run out of fire as he could have done, for his largest antagonist was badly crippled already and the sloop and brig were getting more than enough, with the Red Gauntlet peppering away on one side while he hammered them from the other.

But out seaward, closing all too fast, came three fresh vessels, a "74" and two frigates and the old veteran knew he was lost if they closed in upon him.

So sending in a fearful double broadside at short range which cut away both masts in the brig and took the mizzen-mast out of the sloop-of-war as he ranged between them, he left the nearly helpless frigate behind and stood on into the unimpeded channel.

Passing close to the Red Gauntlet he hailed her and shouted:

"You have helped me nobly, Harry, but up helm and follow me. We must get in where there are shore batteries to back us. They're too many for us, them craft coming in, and we couldn't keep these crippled ducks if we took them, as we could in twenty minutes more!"

Harry saw how fast the fresh British ships were crowding down, so he put up his helm and followed the old War Cloud into New London, for he was anxious to see his father and to have a talk with him about his future course.

The three crippled ships of the enemy, saved only by the arrival of the three powerful vessels which had been in chase of the War Cloud since the latter sighted them off the port of New York, now gave enough trouble to their friends to keep them afloat and to secure them from drifting ashore—the brig having to be taken in tow to save her from going on the rocks.

Harry Brent had half a dozen men fit only for the hospital, hurt in this brief engagement, and several more hit whom he could take care of on board. His vessel received but little damage.

The War Cloud was pretty badly cut up. She had been engaged by a vessel full as heavy as she was, well manned and well fought, and had not Harry been on hand to take a part in the action, as his father said after he came to anchor under the guns of Fort Griswold, he would have been sunk, or forced to lower his flag.

Harry on boarding the War Cloud was grieved to find his dear and true friend Lieutenant Neville mortally wounded, and so many men and officers killed or disabled, that midshipmen were acting as lieutenants, and they had to send to the other ships which were fitting out for surgeons to help their own doctors.

The deck of the War Cloud was slippery with blood and she was riddled by shot wherever there was room for iron to strike.

Yet her grim old-commander had come unscathed out of the storm of death and ruin, though his craft was in a state which would require weeks of skilled labor to repair. Half of his crew, too, were dead or wounded—but he

had crippled three antagonists with a little help and saved his ship with honor.

That was glory enough for one day he thought, and said.

After the dead had been taken on shore for burial and the wounded made as comfortable as possible, poor Neville breathing his last on the frigate he loved so well, Harry had a long and earnest talk with his father. And they conversed more like men and friends than as parent and son.

The commodore, who had been ordered home for service in coast protection, was anxious to have his son with him again. But he would not raise his authority in contradiction to his brave son's own desire. The latter in his new career had fame and fortune before him—a greater chance for fortune than he could even have in the navy.

And when Harry begged his consent to his continuing in command of the privateer for another cruise he ceased to argue against it.

"In a privateer I am my own master," said Harry. "I assume all responsibilities; have no orders to obey, and when we capture a prize she is ours—the full value goes to myself and men, with the just share to the owner. My uncle is pleased with my success—if I lost this craft he would fit out another without waiting for me to ask it."

"All right, my son. I will say no more. You are an honor and credit to our name and to your country. I'll see that you keep your status on the rolls of the navy, so you'll never have any blame attached to you for being off in a private armed craft."

"As to your uncle Carroll, I'm going to see him while my ship is under repairs. I owe him an apology for harsh words spoken in anger, and he shall have it."

"He has forgotten all that long ago, sir."

"No—Harry. Forgiven it, no doubt. True men never forget either kindness or wrong."

"I believe you are correct, father!"

An officer came in to report that a fisherman from outside reported the English vessels last arrived had taken the crippled crafts in tow and were going somewhere down the coast for repairs.

For the first time in weeks the blockade was raised and the channel out to sea clear of all obstruction.

"Then I'm off to sea, without an hour's delay. I'll make a dash into Canadian waters and then sweep across the ocean and send a few prizes into the neutral ports of France. I'll strike the enemy where they least expect a blow!"

This was what Harry said the instant he heard the course to sea was clear for the time.

"God bless you, my dear boy! Brave I know you are, but do nothing rash. It is weakness to throw one's life away, or court risks where there is nothing to gain!"

"Fear not, dear father. I have grown very old in a year and shall never be a boy again. I hope you will go safely through the war. I need say no more!"

They clasped hands and parted, both in tears; such tears are an honor to true and loving hearts.

A half-hour later the Red Gauntlet was standing out of the harbor, heading for sea, ready once more to skim the wave, proud, defiant and hopeful.

Her crew, baptized in fire, were confident under their young captain of more work of the kind which had already made them famous as they were fearless.

Outside, she once more stood on a course almost parallel with the coast, but far enough out to clear all shoals.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SERPENT'S TRAIL.

CAPTAIN LE CLARE, once received at the Brent mansion, became a very frequent visitor. Distinguished in manner, intelligent and full of reminiscences of notable persons met in travel, he was a person who made conversation pleasant and instructive.

Mr. Brent liked him very much. Mrs. Brent thought him agreeable. Only Lucille disliked to meet him. She seemed to feel an intuitive dread of his presence—a feeling of repugnance which she could not explain.

He was obsequiously polite to her, even marked in his attentions, and when she could be induced to sing or touch the harp on which she was an exquisite performer, he was profuse in praise.

This appreciation from one who had traveled and heard the great artists of the Old World, pleased her father and mother—but she, modest and retiring, sung and played rather to please herself than others, and it was hard to induce her to play or sing in his presence.

She never would see him without one or both her parents were present, and then she was a listener rather than a participant in conversation.

He could but see that she felt an aversion to him. And the more she exhibited it, the more he strove to overcome her dislike by the most delicate yet studied perseverance in his visits and his endeavors to interest and please her.

In spite of all this, without knowing really *why*, she began to hate him.

Thus it is that Nature, unknown to us, gives us unseen but tangible warning when peril hovers about us.

Captain Le Clare boarded at the best hotel in the place, rode out frequently on horseback, where his stately form and fine equestrian skill showed to great advantage, and he soon became quite noted in the city, being invited to the first circles, after having been received by Mr. Brent.

Many a fair belle looked with eyes of favor on the princely-appearing foreigner, but he seemed to look coldly on all but one. In the presence of that one he loved to discourse of the lordly castles, the great parks, the galleries of art which he had traversed in Europe. Of town houses replete with elegance and abounding in luxuries.

But she seemed deaf to every florid description—careless of all his pictures, satisfied with her own surroundings. He could not even so interest her as to draw a question from her lips.

When alone with Mr. Brent the captain never tired of praising the talents and the modest, gentle loveliness of his adopted child, and it was almost a wonder that the former did not begin to see a motive in all this.

His wife, keener-sighted than he, saw it, and one day when they were alone told the merchant that the stranger was infatuated with Lucille—that his eyes spoke love or passion whenever they rested on her face and form.

Mr. Brent at first laughed outright at the idea.

"Why, he is as old as I am nearly, and she is but a child in comparison. And she shuns him whenever he visits us and exhibits an aversion rather than a liking for his society. The idea of *love* on his part is simply preposterous!"

"I know it, my dear husband; nevertheless he exhibits it, and it may become dangerous."

"What do you mean?"

"That he is a bold, adventurous man, whose heart once set upon an acquisition, will brook no denial. Even if she hated him, and we encourage him, he would take our girl in marriage!"

"Never! NEVER!" came upon their astonished ears, in tones so startling that both sprung to their feet.

Lucille stood before them.

"I did not mean to be a listener, dear papa and kind mamma. I was asleep in my chair in the alcove and you woke me by your earnest talk. Thus I heard what you said. And I want to tell you now that I *hate* and *fear* the man you talk of. He seems to me a serpent in human form, full of secret guile, who is trying to charm me to my ruin."

"My dear child, from this day I will discountenance his visits. We will not affront him by any rudeness, but we will manage to show him that his attentions to you are undesirable."

"Thank you, dear papa. If we cannot get rid of him in any other way, let mamma and me go to the Rock River home, Buena Vista."

"We will see, dear child. At present, my business requires my attention here. When you go there, unsettled as the whole country now is, in consequence of war, taxation, drafts and the like, I want to be with you both. But take no trouble about this man. He is at least a gentleman, and when he gets a few hints which I shall manage to drop, I think he will 'haul off and change his course,' as sailors say."

An hour later Mr. Brent, with eyes suddenly opened to a dangerous state of affairs, called on Captain Le Clare at his hotel in furtherance of a plan to get him out of Baltimore altogether.

"I have a correspondent in New York," he told the captain, "who is anxious to take a partner in business, special or active, with additional capital to his own. It is a splendid opening, and I think as you desire to invest capital you could have no better opportunity."

"Thanks. I like Baltimore so well I do not think any offer, no matter how tempting, could induce me to leave this city. Society here is delightful, the climate suits me well and—I hardly care to make any change just now."

Le Clare spoke so positive that Mr. Brent gave up his first plan and left the hotel studying another.

"If hints will not suffice and he continues attentions which make Lucille unhappy, there is but one course for me to take," said the merchant, to himself. "I will plainly tell him that his visits to my house must cease."

But the *denouement* came sooner than he expected and was almost as forcible as he could hope for.

That afternoon while Mrs. Brent had gone out to a society meeting of the ladies of the church to which she belonged Lucille was seated in the parlor reading.

Suddenly and unannounced Captain Le Clare entered the room.

She rose, confused, indignant, trembling, and started to leave the room.

He stood between her and the door.

"At last I meet you alone, fair lady," he said, "where I can speak freely and tell you of the adoration which fills my heart!"

"Captain Le Clare—this is *unmanly*! I hate you, and insist upon your leaving the house this instant!" she cried.

"You must hear me, if for only a minute. I can reveal to you a secret which will change all your life. I can place you in the possession of a vast fortune, a noble title, a castle home which is unequaled in antiquity and grandeur—"

"Silence, sir! I wish to hear no more. Keep your secrets to yourself!" was her indignant interruption.

"Hear me! I love you as woman was never loved before."

"Thank Heaven, mamma, you are here!"

Lucille sunk half-fainting into a chair as Mrs. Brent, imperious in anger, threw open the door which he had closed behind him and confronted the intruder.

"Sir, what does this mean?" she cried. "How dare you, in the absence of her natural protectors, come here to annoy and insult this child?"

"Her natural protectors are dead! I came here to offer a fortune and a home which when compared to this is as a palace to a mud-cabin!"

"Well, sir, you have had *her* reply! Now hear *mine*! Leave this house, instantly, and never do you presume to enter it again!"

"Madam, I leave it because I do not waste words on a woman whose temper is aroused. But I say to you both that I am not easily foiled in what I undertake. What cannot be won in one way can be effected in another. That girl shall be *mine*!"

He turned on his heel and passed out of the house.

"Who admitted him—did you?" asked Mrs. Brent.

"No, mamma—you know I would admit no man in your absence. He first showed himself in the parlor where I was reading. Ask the servants if any of them let him in!"

This was done. No one had heard a knock or even seen any one approach the door. The door had been left unlocked when Mrs. Brent went out, and he had walked in unannounced.

"Hereafter the door will be kept locked!" said the lady. "I do not think he will ever attempt another visit. If he does, your papa will learn him a lesson he will not soon forget!"

"Oh, mamma—he will do us some great evil, I fear! He is a bad, *bad* man. His eyes burned like sparks of fire when he uttered that threat. Oh, how I wish my dear Harry was here!"

"Do not fear, child. You shall have ample protection. Your father deals with no gentle hand when once he is aroused. The man who threatens our peace will not stay long in Baltimore."

Captain Le Clare was furious when he left that house humiliated by those he had worked so long and hard to conciliate. He walked hastily down the streets leading to the Brent stores, and as he passed in front of the central store where Nicodemus Sparkle was engaged in his usual duties, he cast one fiery look at the clerk, dropped a piece of white paper and passed on.

"Gosh all hemlock! He looked as if he'd like to eat me! I wonder what's up!" muttered the clerk, as he picked up the paper and found it blank.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NICODEMUS CHANGES MASTERS.

NICODEMUS SPARKLE was wild with excitement till it was time to close the stores. He dared not ask to be excused when he could give no reason which would not lead to inquiries as to his business elsewhere, yet in that piece of blank paper he had received a summons to the rendezvous in Pell street from the man of many mysteries, as he began to consider Doctor Rose, Captain Le Clare—or *who*?

The face of this mysterious man had appeared flushed—his eyes were flashing, and he walked with a long, impatient stride as he passed the store, instead of coming in as he had so often lately done, to talk with Mr. Brent.

As soon as he was free, Nicodemus hurried to Pell street, pausing only once on the route to drink a glass of strong beer with which to steady his nerves.

"So, sir! you have come at last! I've waited two hours for your appearance!"

This, and an angry look, was the greeting he received.

"Gosh all hemlock! I couldn't get here no sooner. I had to wait till the store was shut up. If I'd left sooner, I'd be discharged. The old man only wants a good excuse. They've all been down on me since I tore Miss Lucille's dress to find that mark for you!"

"Well, you can resign and save the discharge! Do so in the morning. I'll take you into my employ and treble your salary with less work if you are faithful to me, and ME only!"

"Gosh all hemlock! I'm your man, and no discount on time. What am I to do?"

"Whatever I bid you do and ask no questions. In the first place I want to buy or charter a fast and weatherly vessel of small size, yet large enough to cross the ocean in safety. The smaller the better, if fully seaworthy, for she will not need a large crew! I want you, who are fa-

miliar with the wharves and vessels, to look up such a craft for me. I don't want to be known in the purchase, or charter, whichever it is to be—not now at any rate!"

"Gosh all hemlock! I know of a craft that'll suit you to a dot. She is in the Havana trade, fast, and a good sea-boat. She runs the blockade every time in and out, and don't mind the men-o'-war no more than if there was none. I reckon she's from eighty to ninety tons, carries a captain, mate, cook and six or seven men. She's called the Sally Ann, and Ebenezer Coffin owns and runs her. He insures where we do, and I've known him eight or nine years!"

"Is her cabin large and roomy?" asked Le Clare.

"Yes, sir, when it isn't stowed full of fruit, as he often has it when she comes in. I'm not sure she is in now, but they were lookin' for her yesterday, and Ebenezer Coffin is generally on hand when he says he will be!"

"Very well—find out when you leave me and report. This will be your room to lodge in and eat in, from now on. You will order what you want from the restaurant three doors below. I pay all the bills. You understand. You resign that clerkship without a word as to your new employer, and henceforth act as my secretary!"

"Yes, sir! I write an A 1 hand and am up in figures—top notch!"

"I am known as Captain Le Clare, at the City Hotel, where I board. When you report there, remember it. *Here*—I am Doctor Rose. When we are across the ocean you may hear me addressed by yet another name."

"Gosh all hemlock! Am I to cross the ocean with you?"

"Yes. Now get your supper, and then see if that vessel is in port. If she is, find out her prices, or what her owner will charter for, to sail in ballast and provisioned for two or three months. Also how soon she can be completely fitted for a voyage of three thousand miles."

He rose and went out, leaving Nicodemus alone in the furnished room. The latter sat in silence for a little while. It was growing dusk—night was closing in. He took a piece of paper, ignited it at a small wood fire in the fireplace, and lighted an oil lamp on the table.

"So—I'm to live here rent free and eat all I want from the restaurant. Gosh all hemlock! I'll have ham and eggs and soft-shell crabs and a whole pot o' coffee for my supper and top off with a pint o' beer. Who is afraid of expense when he hasn't got to pay it himself?"

Nicodemus went to the restaurant and satisfied himself that Doctor Rose had fixed matters all right financially, and then he ordered his supper. He made his demands sufficient for a very voracious appetite, and half an hour later he could hardly breathe, he had eaten so much.

If he had paid for it himself, his supper would have consisted of a sixpenny plate of oysters, crackers thrown in, and a half-pint of beer.

Feeling the need of exercise to settle such a meal, Nicodemus went down to the wharf where the Sally Ann usually lay when in port.

To his joy she was there, having arrived the night before.

Ebenezer Coffin was on board, pacing his after-deck, smoking a pipe after his supper. He knew Nicodemus, having dealt a good deal with Mr. Brent at one time and another in sugars and coffee brought from Habana.

"How d'ye do, old Hemlock?" he cried, as he recognized Nicodemus by a nickname often given him.

"First-rate, Cap'n Coffin. Gosh all hemlock! I'm glad to see you. Don't you want to sell out?"

"That's done a'ready," said the Yankee skipper. "I had the hull cargo engaged afore I sat for Havana. In these times you can sell fast and high too, when you once run a cargo in."

"I don't mean your cargo. What'll you take for your schooner, cash down?"

"Who wants her? Is it Mr. Brent?"

"Gosh all hemlock, no! It is *me*, Nicodemus Sparkle, Esquire!"

"You? Why, you couldn't buy the two anchors on her bows. You put every cent you git on that skeleton frame o' yours in the shape o' clothes to try an' look less like a monkey than you are!"

"Captain Coffin, I didn't come here to be *insulted*! Gosh all hemlock, there's other schooners on the water besides your old tub. I'm instructed to buy or charter a schooner about the size o' this, and I can do it, too. So, *good-night*!"

Nicodemus started for the wharf as angry as he could be.

"Hold on, Nicodemus Sparkle, Esquire! If you do mean business and can show the *pewter*, I'd as quick deal with you as anybody. Come in the cabin, and while my cook an' steward mixes us a real old Jamaica punch, hot, we'll see if we can *dicker*."

"Captain Coffin—I'll do it *this* time. But—gosh all hemlock. Don't get me mad again. I'm a livin' whirlwind when I get real mad. You should have seen me kick young Harry Brent into the middle of the street right before his uncle's house, when he insulted me before my sweetheart!"

"Not the Red Gauntlet man—you didn't kick him?"

"Yes, *I did*, and he felt so 'shamed that he went right off to sea. Gosh all hemlock—when I git mad, things just *hum!*"

"Like a hive o' bees, *hey?* Never mind! I like to hear men *brag*. After we've emptied a bowl o' that punch, it'll turn out to be the *uncle* you kicked, maybe!"

"Gosh all hemlock, no! Do you think I'd kick him when I'm goin' to marry his only daughter? Not much, Mr. Man—no such folly in Nicodemus Sparkle, Esquire. I don't work for Carroll Brent, since I've come heir to more money than I know what to do with. How do you like the looks o' them?"

They were in the cabin of the Sally Ann now, and Sparkle rolled out his seven golden doubloons on the table.

"Real stuff and full weight!" said the skipper, as he rung one on the table and held it in his hand. "They're seventeen dollars in silver to the ounce!" he added.

Then he called to his steward to mix a bowl of Jamaica punch, *hot*, and to make it "*nor*", *nor-west*"—in other words, strong.

After Nicodemus had swallowed a mug of this concoction, his little green-gray eyes fairly snapped. The Yankee skipper drank off his mug without winking and then said:

"Now I'm ready to talk business, if *you* are. This schooner is for sale, but 'twill take a high figure to buy her. I'm makin' money in her, *good* money, every trip, and she's insured for five years to come for all she's worth. That would go in o' course!"

"What'll the figure be?" asked Nicodemus.

"Twenty thousand hard dollars—silver or gold!" was the answer. "She's worth it to *me*, whether she is to anybody else, is another question!"

"Gosh all hemlock. My man never would pay as much as that!" said Nicodemus, thus revealing that he was bidding for another party. "What'll you charter by the month for?"

"Two thousand a month and sail and navigate her myself—your man to find mate, crew and stores for all hands!"

"I reckon he'll take her on *that* figure. I'm to report in the morning!" said Nicodemus.

"Who is your man, as you call him?"

"He is my employer and I'm his secretary. He has no end of cash and pays me three times as much as old Brent used to. Gosh all hemlock, what a fool I've been to slave all these years for the next thing to nothing!"

"Maybe old Brent, as you call him, gave you all he thought you was worth!" said Ebenezer Coffin, as he swallowed another mug of punch.

"If he did, he'll know I'm worth more now. I'm to have a new suit o' French broadcloth in the morning. And I'll go by his house and make eyes at his girl—see if I *lon't*."

"Is she fond of you?"

"Gosh all hemlock, yes. Why she called me her dear little *duck* the other day."

"Didn't she mean *goose*?"

"Gosh all hemlock! You're *awful* funny to-night, cap'n. Maybe it's the punch goin' to your head."

"Most like it is. Have another mug?"

"Not to-night. I've got to be up attendin' to business in the mornin'. There's a month's wages due me at old Brent's yet, and I've got to draw that and see my new employer. I'll be down here some time in the day with his answer. I reckon he'll take the charter."

Nicodemus had all he wanted to carry when he headed for his Pell street lodgings.

CHAPTER XXX.

BROGUE AND BROGAN DRILL—PLOT DEEPENS FAST.

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Nicodemus Sparkle had breakfasted on porter-house steak, fried potatoes, milk toast and chocolate. And in his new suit of broadcloth he stood in front of the stores of Mr. Carroll Brent, waiting for that gentleman to appear.

He had a toothpick in his hand, but no pencil behind his ear, and he was not in his shirt sleeves.

Mr. Brent was so preoccupied, coming up the street with his head bent down, as if in thought, that he did not see the clerk until he almost ran against him.

"Ah—it's *you*, Sparkle? Did you bill those goods for Frederick City? Two wagon-loads as I told you last night?"

"No, sir; 'twas too late then."

"Well—go at it now, and be in a hurry about it."

"*Can't*. Got better business."

"Sparkle—do you know who you are talking to?"

"Gosh all hemlock—yes. You're *old* Brent. Pay me my month's wages. I'm done here!"

"I think you *are*—you impertinent rascal. *Drunk* at this time of day? Porter, take this puppy by the ear, lead him into the office, and tell the head clerk it is my orders to pay him off. Then kick him into the street."

"Faith, I'll do it right gladly, sir—for we men in front have had to bear a good deal from the rascalion that he is."

And the order was obeyed in the strictest sense.

When Nicodemus was lifted half-way across the street on the square toe of the porter's brogan, and he heard his new broadcloth unmentionables splitting with the force that sent him forward on his hands and knees, he groaned in the depths of tribulation and wished he hadn't been quite so rash when he put on airs before his late employer.

"What's the matter, *Hemlock*?" asked Captain Ebenezer Coffin, who came along just as he got on his feet and was trying to brush some of the dirt off his new, but nearly ruined clothes.

"*Nothin'*! I was just seeing how far I could jump and I fell down," groaned Nicodemus.

And he started for his lodgings to repair damages.

An hour or so later Nicodemus sent his name up to Captain Le Clare, who was in his private parlor in the City Hotel. The office-boy was told to bring the visitor up, and soon the latter was in the presence of his new employer, and without delay made his report in regard to the vessel.

"I shall not need her at most over two months. The charter will suit me best. You can send this captain here to see me in person. Let him call to-morrow at ten in the morning," said Le Clare.

"And now, Mr. Sparkle, you may as well know what I am going to do, so you can be prepared to help me. I do not *ask* you to *keep* my secrets. I simply say to you that if you ever betray one of them or divulge anything I intrust you with, I will *kill* you within an hour from the time I learn of your treachery!"

"Gosh all hemlock, captain, I'll be silent as the grave."

"Or silent *in* it! I am going to abduct and marry Miss Lucille Brent."

"Gosh all hemlock—is *that* so? Cap'n you'll get a Tartar! I wanted her once, but no *Brent* in mine any more, if you please. They've all got more temper than wildcats. Why, sir, I asked for my pay this morning and old Brent made his Irish porter lead me by the ear to the office to get it and then had me kicked into the street. The wretch half-killed me."

"Well, you'll get satisfaction before long. Now listen to me. Do you know anything of the interior arrangements of the Brent mansion?"

"I reckon I do. I've been all over it a hundred times. I used to run all their errands for 'em and in the spring help in house-cleaning and the like."

"Where does Lucille, the daughter, sleep?"

"Front room, right over the door in second story—first room head of the stairs."

"And her parents?"

"Back of the parlor—first floor, right over the basement dining-room."

"How many servants?"

"*Three*—cook, maid of all work and coachman."

"No other persons about the house?"

"Only a big watchdog chained in the back yard. Gosh all hemlock, but he is savage, though."

"There is no need to go into the back yard. If the cook could be induced by a bribe to fix a supper for the rest in the house, they might sleep so sound there would be no trouble in reaching the young lady's room and bringing her down to a carriage in the night without noise."

"That's so, captain; but the cook is a slave, and they're apt to be faithful."

"A *slave*? The promise of *freedom* might do more than money with her."

"Gosh all hemlock, yes! But there are no free niggers in this country."

"I know it; but where I shall carry that lady her race is free."

"Not in Martinique, where I heard old Brent say you lived?"

"No; but in England, where I am going."

"Gosh all hemlock! You are not goin' there while the war lasts?"

"I *am*, and you are going with me!"

"Gosh all hemlock! How are we to get there?"

"In the vessel I buy or charter. *Mark me*—what I undertake I carry through! I have the means, the courage, the will. I *crush* all who stand in my way. A fortune of three million pounds is before me. Do you think I will hesitate at any risk when I undertake to secure that? Besides—I have a debt of vengeance to pay! And I *will* pay it, with interest!"

Nicodemus Sparkle trembled under the gaze of those fiery eyes.

"Now—I have *told* you enough to show you what I am about to undertake. You will hold yourself at my bidding, day and night, till my work is done. You shall be paid *well* as you go on—better when all my ends are all accomplished!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Does this cook you speak of often leave the house?" continued Le Clare.

"Almost every morning, before the rest are up, she goes to market for steaks, cutlets or fish and oysters. And she *almost* always gets a drop of gin when she is out!"

"Then she can be seen and talked to! And it must be done. Carefully approached by a proper person she may be won to do what I wish when all else is prepared!"

"Yes, sir—you're a master hand to plan!"

"You will be sure of it as I proceed. Now go and see the owner of that schooner and have him here at the hour I named!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And *remember*—treachery is death!"

"Gosh all hemlock! I'll not forget."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SURPRISE—IS HE A BRITISH SPY?

MR. CARROLL BRENT received his Northern mail just after his porter had instructed Nicodemus Sparkle in the first rudiments of the brogan drill. And it brought him glorious news, which was soon after produced in extra sheets by the enterprising publisher of their principal paper.

His brother, Commodore Brent had arrived from the Asiatic Station in the frigate War Cloud. Failing to enter the port of New York by the way of Sandy Hook in consequence of falling in with the English fleet outside, he had headed for the entrance to Long Island Sound by way of Montauk Point, chased by a large force of the enemy.

Off Montauk, he was attacked by a frigate of full his own weight in guns—with even more men on board and that frigate while in action was reinforced by a sloop-of-war and a sixteen-gun brig.

The battle was going very hard with the War Cloud and her capture or destruction seemed inevitable, when the Red Gauntlet privateer, just ready for sea after her recent battles, gallantly put out and was boldly thrown into the action by her brave young captain, Harry Brent, son of the commodore.

This timely aid turned the tide and the War Cloud aided by the privateer poured in such a deadly fire at close quarters that she crippled the frigate, the brig was dismantled by the joint fire and the sloop-of-war so cut up she was hardly able to keep afloat.

Every British vessel would have struck their colors, had not the chasing fleet from off New York hove in sight and forced the War Cloud and her gallant consort to run for New London where the shore batteries were a safeguard from further attack.

Thus one of the most gallant and well contested sea-fights ever recorded, resulting in immense damage to the enemy, was closed by the escape of the frigate and privateer from a far superior force.

The enemy to save the crippled ships had to haul them away for damages, and the privateer at once put to sea without hindrance to pursue further her famous career.

Harry had written a brief line to his uncle and Lucille just as he was on the point of sailing. He said he had passed unhurt through the last engagement, and was then bound out to do some dashing work on the Canadian coast.

In a postscript he added, without explanation:

"A delightful surprise awaits you. H. B."

Mr. Brent at once sent the letter with this news to his house by a clerk, with word that he would be home early to dinner, after attending to some business correspondence which he could not neglect. He could not delay a moment in sending the news to his good wife and Lucille, which he knew would give *them* joy.

An hour earlier than usual he was at his door, where he was met by Lucille, who ran into his arms, and showering kisses on his face, cried out:

"Dear, dear papa—the *surprise* Harry hinted at has come. *It* came in the same stage that brought the mail. *It* is on its way to Washington, but will stay with us a day or two. *It* is in the parlor waiting to receive you with open arms."

"Child, have you gone crazy. What do you mean by *it*?"

"Come and see, papa."

And she drew him into the parlor as fast as she could pull him along.

The next minute he was in the arms of the gallant old commodore, and both men were actually weeping with joy.

"*It* is indeed a surprise, but one that fills my heart with happiness," said Carroll Brent, as side by side he and his brother stood, while the bright eyes of Lucille glowed with pleasure and Mrs. Brent laughed and cried alternately over the *surprise* so well concocted.

"We have an hour yet to dinner time; spend it in telling us of that last battle in which our Harry played such a gallant part. For we *all* claim a share in Harry, do we not, dear Lucille?"

"I claim his heart, and that is the best part of him," said Lucille, with a happy flush on her lovely face.

"His enemies think he has a heavy hand," said the old commodore.

"It is always kind when placed in mine," she answered.

"He is a glorious boy—an honor to our name and blood," said the uncle.

"And the architect of his own fortune," said Mrs. Brent.

"Not quite. Had not my brother nobly received him, after I had cruelly driven him from me, and given him a command which he has made famous, where would he be now? I give my good brother only the credit that is his due. You have all had a share in helping my boy—this fair girl I expect the most—for love always sets valiant adrift."

Mrs. Brent now went from the room to see to the setting on of dinner, and the commodore and his brother sat down by the window. Lucille stood between them, looking out.

"There is that wretch *Le Clare*!" she said, pointing to a person passing on the other side of the street.

The commodore gave the man one glance and cried out:

"What is he doing here? He must be a *British spy*! I know him—saw him last in the cabin of Admiral Howe, Lord Sunderland's brother!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

RECOGNITION—AN OLD CHARACTER IN A NEW DRESS.

LE CLARE cast an angry look from his flashing eyes toward the window he was passing, and for an instant paused and turned deadly white, as if paralyzed, for he saw by the looks and gestures of that old man in naval uniform that he was recognized. Then, drawing his hat forward over his eyes, he hurried on. He had recognized the officer also and remembered well where they had met, for the circumstances were too peculiar to be easily forgotten by either.

"It was five years ago, when I was in Portsmouth harbor, England, with my ship," said the old commodore, in explanation, "that I saw that dark-visaged fellow whom you call *Le Clare*. He was a secretary, or something of the sort, to Admiral Howe, and I was visiting the latter in his cabin, when he found some grievous error in an official paper this chap had made out, and he went for him red-hot. He told him that if it hadn't been he was a *protégé* of his brother—Lord Sunderland—he would degrade him and send him before the mast."

"The fellow cast back such a look of hate when he turned his back that I never have forgotten it. There was murder in the look. And that same look is on his face yet—it was that which made me remember him at a glance. What is his name here?"

"He calls himself Captain *Le Clare* and hails from Martinique in the French West Indies!"

"His name there was nothing like it. It was English, I know, but I forget now what it was. What is he doing here?"

"Living on his means. He seems to have plenty of money!"

"A British spy would be well supplied with funds to carry out his mission. This fellow is English and he'll bear watching, if I'm not a long way off my reckoning!"

"I will so inform the Committee of Safety this very evening and see that he is watched or warned to leave the city!" said Mr. Brent.

"Dinner waits!" said Mrs. Brent, coming in, and she bade Lucille escort the commodore to the table.

"Ten thousand curses—he *knows* me! It is the Yankee commodore, who heard Admiral Howe abuse me like a thief, because I changed three or four pompous words in a report for something better! He'll make me trouble, if he remembers my real name, as he most likely does, for I heard the admiral tell him who I was—a poor *protégé* of his brother, who had the sense to leave me a small legacy when he died! I must sail under new colors and at once!"

This was what *Le Clare* said to himself, as he hurried on after passing the Brent mansion.

In twenty minutes he was in the room on Pell street now occupied by Nicodemus Sparkle. The latter sat back in a chair, his feet elevated on the mantle-piece and his thin legs over the hearth on which a little fire was smoldering.

Between his thin lips, Mr. Sparkle held a genuine Havana. Before his circumstances altered, Maryland tobacco in a corn-cob pipe satisfied his desires as a smoker.

He started to his feet when his employer entered, and threw his half-finished cigar into the fire.

"Sparkle—I've work for you and it must be done quickly!" said the captain. "I will write an order—you will go to the hotel, pay my bill, say I have been suddenly called out of town, get my two trunks, put them on a cart and bring them here!"

"Gosh all hemlock! What is the matter?"

"Silence, sir! Your duty is to obey orders and ask no questions!"

Sparkle stood trembling, for those flashing eyes and the fierce look in that face completely awed his coward nature.

The captain took pen, ink and paper from the table-drawer and wrote an order for his baggage. Then he took a purse of gold from his pocket, counted its contents to see if there was enough to pay his bill, handed it to Sparkle and said sternly:

"Be off! If asked where Captain *Le Clare* has gone, say to New York, whither you are to

follow him. Not another word. You will find me here when you get back! And waste no time!"

Nicodemus Sparkle was too much scared to reply. He put the heavy purse in his pocket and hurried away.

The instant he was gone, Captain *Le Clare* drew another purse from his pocket, looked at its contents and then hurried out to the street.

The sign of three golden balls and a pole with old clothes hung over and out of a door a half-block away attracted his attention and into that house he soon after entered.

He came out in a little while with a large bundle under his arm. With this he re-entered the room he had assigned to Sparkle.

Then he went down to the owner of the house in the bar room below and engaged another room up-stairs, for a friend of his, whom he expected every hour, paying the rent two weeks in advance.

This friend he said was an old sea captain, who came to get a vessel which was not yet ready for him.

This done, he took the key of the new room—and then went up-stairs to his old quarters.

A half-hour more went by and Sparkle returned with the trunks. He had paid the bill, taken a receipt and had the baggage.

Entering the room, where he expected to find his employer, he started back in surprise, for a stranger was there.

A man clad in rough sea-toggery—a shaggy pea-jacket, wide trousers, with a tarpaulin hat over grayish, tangled hair.

What could he see of a face almost covered with whiskers as grizzled as his hair, was brown as mahogany. The eyes, black, deep-set, were bent upon an old chart which was spread out on the table.

Sparkle looked at the man full a minute before he spoke and then turned to tell the truckman who was bringing up the trunks to leave them in the hall. Then, coming into the room, he assumed a look of importance and said:

"Look here, Mr. Sailor-man, I reckon you've got into the wrong berth! This is my room!"

"Is it? Any port in a storm, is my motto, mate. I've anchored here and I'm going to stay, so you can belay all jaw-tackle and order up some grog!"

The intruder was large, of heavy build and looked as if he wouldn't hesitate to toss a little fellow like Nicodemus out of the window. And the latter had a respect for brawn and muscle. He had so little of either himself.

"Wait—just wait till Captain *Le Clare* comes. He'll make you move in a hurry, too!" cried Sparkle, desperately annoyed, but afraid to try to eject the intruder on his own account.

"Who's *Le Clare*? Some French dancin' master with more leels than brains?" growled the sailor-man.

"He is a gentleman and that's more than you are, comin' into another man's room an' making himself at home there."

"Do you call yourself a man? You look more like a sea-sick monkey! What does this *Le Clare* do for a living?"

"Minds his own business and that's more than you do!"

"Bravo—my good secretary—well answered!" And *Le Clare* spoke now in his natural voice.

"Gosh all hemlock! Is it you, sir?" cried the astonished ex-clerk.

"It is me and it is not me! Hereafter I am Captain Bill Masten and till we sail I shall occupy the next room front, where you can put my trunks now. Remember, Captain *Le Clare* and Doctor Rose are both dead and only Captain Masten is alive and you are in his employment!"

"Yes, sir. Your disguise beats me. You look no more like your former self than I look like old Brent! I never saw so complete a change!"

"So much the better for my plans! We have got to go to work to perfect them at once. I want you to be out to see that cook when she goes to market in the morning. Treat her, buy her secrecy and win her confidence. When you have got her mind in a state so she can be influenced to work for us, the hardest part of that matter is over. Meantime I must perfect the chartering of the schooner. That I will now see to in person. How much money did you have left after paying my bill at the hotel and the truckman?"

"A little over twenty dollars, sir. Here it is!"

"Keep it—you will need pocket-money. Your salary I shall pay at the end of every month. It will be just one hundred dollars!"

"Gosh all hemlock! Twelve hundred a year and board! I'll be an *Esquire* yet!" cried Sparkle, in exuberant delight.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAPTAIN BILL MASTEN CHARTERS THE SALLY ANN.

As soon as dinner was over Commodore Brent accompanied his brother to the rooms of a body of leading citizens, who formed what was known as the Safety Committee. It was their duty to take cognizance of all matters endangering the public welfare. The president

was a neighbor and an intimate friend of Mr. Carroll Brent, and when the latter told him that an Englishman under an assumed name was boarding at the City Hotel, it was decided that he should be called on and forced to explain himself.

"He has paid his bill, got his baggage and left for New York."

This was the answer of the hotel proprietor when the party inquired for Captain *Le Clare*.

"The rascal! He recognized me when I saw him, and knew I would expose him," said the commodore. "No doubt but he is a spy. English gold is used free on land and water when England has ends to gain. No doubt this rascal has plans of every fortification in and about the city; knows the lay of everything. It is a pity we couldn't have grappled with him, and stretched a couple of fathoms of hemp with him at one end of it."

"I will send his full description to New York," said the president of the committee. "They will arrest and fix him there."

"If not under some new disguise," said Mr. Brent. "He is shrewd and plausible—a most dangerous man. For weeks he has been an almost constant visitor at my house, and until very recently a welcome one, for I supposed him to be a gentleman in every sense."

"It is too bad that he has escaped. His flight on recognition proves his guilt in my mind. Especially so sudden. He must have left within an hour after he saw the commodore," said the committee man.

"I fear this city and Washington are both doomed to attack," said Mr. Brent.

"What special reasons have you for that idea?" asked his friend.

"The massing of so many vessels in Chesapeake Bay by the enemy. They hold the lower bay and all approaches to it. They have, the pilots tell me, a crowd of transports with troops on board ready to be landed at any point where resistance could not be made effective."

"We will make it effective here. With Fort McHenry well manned, good batteries covering all points leading to the town by water and land, we will make it warm for any British force that tries to reach us. Our Home Guard is diligent and active and the military forces in our vicinity as good as we could hope for."

"If I only had a good fleet to handle, even half a dozen such vessels as the old *War Cloud*, I'd clear the lower bay," said the commodore.

"It was madness in our Government to declare war before we had a navy strong enough to hold our own coast with. Every vessel we have afloat will not count up to a single fleet of the enemy and we have a fleet of theirs to look at in front of every port along the coast."

"True, every word," said Mr. Brent.

The latter now took his brother down to his stores, where he had a few directions to leave before returning home for the night.

Neither of them noticed an awkward appearing man in sailor dress who walked by them with a sea roll in his gait as they entered the store, but he eyed them closely and a sardonic chuckle left his lips as they went out of sight.

"Carroll Brent thinks that I have fled the city and given up my intentions to possess the fair Lucille," he said. "Soon—too soon for him, I'll dispel that hallucination. I have sworn that she and her fortune shall both be mine. When I get her I hold every proof necessary to claim the vast estates to which she is sole heir. And brief shall be the time ere all this is accomplished. Delays are ever dangerous, and I will not delay."

"Now to see this Yankee skipper, feed his natural love of gain and charter his craft."

"After that—if he is to go as captain and navigator, I will select mates and crew to my liking, and thus hold the control of the craft when I want it."

He was on his way to visit the Sally Ann at this time. In her cabin he found Ebenezer Coffin, making up in an old account book the profits on freight and commission of his last trip. They seemed to be satisfactory, for he closed the book with a smile on his face when his visitor entered the cabin, and said:

"How d'ye do. You're skipper o' this dandy little boat, aren't you?"

"I calculate I be!" said Ebenezer, taking a measurement look at the other from head to foot.

"I sent a man to see you about sale or charter?"

"Oh—little Hemlock, or Sparkle. Are you the man he said would see me to-day?"

"I am. You ask a high price to sell outright. And if I have good luck I shall finish my voyage and get what I'm after in a couple of months at the very longest. So to charter would be my best course."

"Jest so. Where be you bound?"

"On a voyage of nigh three thousand miles, but you see to me there is big money in it—a fortune if I get what I seek."

"Oh, it's a kind of a chance, eh? Well, if you charter you'll pay cash on the nail afore we start?"

"Exactly. That is my intention, cap'n—I forget the name Sparkle gave me."

"Coffin—Ebenezer Coffin."

"And mine is Bill Masten—sometimes I'm Cap'n Bill among them that know me. I struck luck awhile ago and got considerable money, but I know where to reach enough to last me and mine a lifetime, with plenty to spare, and I'm willing to spend a few thousand a-getting to it. Your craft looks fast, she is roomy and seems weatherly."

"She is all that, Cap'n Masten. You're a sailor, and ought to know when you've looked her over."

"State-rooms in the cabin? Yes—I see one on each side. That's snug. You told my clerk you'd take—"

"Two thousand dollars a month and me as cap'n and navigator thrown in. I'm worth a couple o' hundred a month any day. Besides the insurance calls for me as cap'n."

"That is fair. I'm ready to close and pay a month down in cash now to bind the bargain."

"After the charter is drawn up, fair and square, in black and white. That's my way o' doin' business. I takes no advantage and allows none took on me."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STAND AND DELIVER—RANSOM OR REPRISAL.

WHEN the Red Gauntlet stood out to sea from New London, through an open channel, her young captain headed away to the northward with every sail drawing that could be set close-hauled for he had a fresh northwestern gale to hang to.

"The nearer in the smoother the water, cap'ting, for we'll be under the lee o' the land," said Seth Coffin when they shaped their course.

By daylight they came just in sight of the low islands to the west and making their twelve knots on a clear log line, and before night several vessels they had no desire to close with—a British fleet off Boston—were sighted.

Keeping a good offing they soon ran out of sight of those, and then, except an occasional fisherman along the rocky front of New Hampshire and Maine, saw nothing for which to change course, or rise tack or sheet for several days.

It was noon on his fifth day out. The meridian observation put Harry Brent near the upper end of Nova Scotia. Land was in sight to the westward and close in-shore fishing boats were seen on the banks.

"We will soon be in the course of vessels bound to Europe from the ports on the St. Lawrence—Quebec and Montreal," said Harry Brent to Mr. Coffin, who had the watch just et.

"Yes, sir—I reckon there's some o' 'em heaving in sight now."

The man aloft had just sung out "Sail, ho!" and reported three square-rigged vessels dead ahead, bearing off to the eastward.

"After we've all had dinner we'll be near enough to see what they are," said Harry, calmly. "It isn't likely they're men-of-war away up here out of the range of our commerce."

An hour passed and a barque and two full-rigged ships came in plain sight from deck, not over five or six miles away. A close observation through the glass showed two to be merchantmen by their stumpy masts and clumsy look. The other, the smaller ship of the three, had a smarter look. She *might* be a man-of-war.

Harry, confident in speed, that he could choose whom to attack and whom to avoid, cleared ship for action and stood on, taking in only his royal and flying jib, so as to handle his craft easier in the breeze which blew fresh enough to make his light spars buckle and snap like reeds in a squall.

When within a mile of the leading ship it could be seen that she was lumber laden. Soon the next, but a little way astern, was found to have a similar cargo as her deck load.

The craft astern was deep in the water and seemed to be a loaded vessel, but her masts were taunt, her yards square, and she either carried guns, or had false ports.

The Red Gauntlet till now had shown no colors, but suddenly up went the Stars and Stripes at her gaff and the famous *burgee*, the Red Gauntlet, to the main-truck. A gun—not blank, but shotted sent its messenger hissing across the bows of the leading ship, which like the rest had shown no colors as yet.

Quickly she took the hint and hoisting the cross of St. George, hove to.

Evidently there was no thought of resistance there. The second vessel, a barque, showed the same colors, and also hove up in the wind with her maintopsail aback.

The third, running up French colors, did not heave to, but sheered off, as if to avoid the privateer, taking a course which would carry her far to leeward.

Evidently she thought, or rather her commander did, she would make an offing while the privateer was engaged in taking possession of the two foremost vessels, if she so intended.

"That craft is no more French than we are, cap'ting," said Coffin, as he closely scanned the vessel trying to get away. "And I'll bet that she is worth double as much as both the others, or she wouldn't be in such a hurry to get out of our way."

"I think you are right, Mr. Coffin, and we will test her value first," said Harry.

Running within a pistol-shot of the lumber laden craft, he hailed them and ordered them to remain hove to until he was ready to board and inspect.

"If you bear away before I board you, I'll follow and burn you to the water's edge!" was his threat as he shot by them and held a course direct for the ship that flew French colors.

The latter now stood off square before the wind, but in less than half an hour a shot sent so close it threw water on her decks, brought her to, and the privateer, with her batteries full-manned luffed close on her weather beam.

"What ship is that?" asked Captain Brent.

"L'Orient—de Bordeaux!" was the answer.

"Not much! I smell beaver castor too plain!" cried Seth Coffin, who all along had held his opinion of the craft. "The Hudson Bay Fur Company doesn't carry the French flag by right—and a cargo of furs is worth more than pine deals by a long sight."

"Send a boat on board with your papers. The captain will bring them himself if he knows when he is well off!" shouted Brent.

"Who are you, anyway?" cried a bluff-looking man in semi-military uniform, who had not shown himself before.

"The Red Gauntlet, American privateer, and you'll soon find a rough crowd aboard if you show any British insolence."

"Oh, we give up—there's no use trying to fool a blasted Yankee," said the man who spoke last. "We've heard of you before. Haul down that French rag, and there's no need to hoist another. You've got us—and that ends it."

"What ship and what cargo?" asked Harry, a pleased look on his smooth face.

"Hudson Bay Company's ship Orkney, furs and peltries," was the sullen answer.

"Mr. Coffin, take ten men aboard, armed, and run down in my wake to where the lumber ships are," said Harry. "Then I'll decide what to do with this craft. Secure her papers when you go aboard."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

In ten minutes the Orkney was heading back for the lumber ships in company with her captor.

On the latter their scanty crews waited, the captains full of fear, for the threat of firing them put them in great consternation.

Their papers were brought aboard and both vessels found to belong to the same owner with the cargoes included. He was the richest man, the captains said, in the provinces, and owned the large mills and lumber village known as Zadousac—at the mouth of the Sanguenay on the St. Lawrence.

"If I let you go on will you give me a bond on your ships for full value and cargo, payable at the close of the war wherever the ships are found, the bonds to be void if your owner pays half the face when I see him, as I soon shall?" asked Harry, of both lumber captains, when they stood trembling on his deck. "You choose between that and the flames. If you give the bonds you are free to continue your voyage to London."

They chose to give the bonds. When these were prepared and signed, Harry had the officers and crew from the Hudson Bay ship, thirty in number, divided between the two lumbermen.

"You were bound to England. I will not delay your voyage," he said. "I have no provisions to spare for useless prisoners, so I let you go."

The transfer was made and the lumber ships on their course in less than two hours from the time the signal to heave to was fired.

And then Josiah Nettles, with a crew of fifteen men, all told, was placed in charge of the Orkney and her cargo valued by her manifest at over two hundred thousand dollars, with orders to sail for Portland, Maine, as the nearest port he could reach safely. He was to hold the prize in charge of the commissioners there and wait for the Red Gauntlet which would touch at that port after her intended cruise up the St. Lawrence.

"A nice day's work and no powder wasted!" said Seth Coffin, when they headed up for the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while the lumber-laden ships stood out to sea with their unhappy and uninvited passengers.

"Yes—it *pays*. But 'tis dull work!" said Harry.

They stood on, and when night fell had rounded the east end of Nova Scotia and headed into the great bay.

They saw a sail, a cutter-built craft, just as night set in, too far ahead to attract attention, and might not have given her a second thought had she kept out of their way.

But about an hour before midnight, in the dim starlight, she loomed up close aboard and a sharp, authoritative voice hailed:

"Schooner ahoy! Heave to, I'm coming aboard!"

"An English revenue cutter—we'll humor her!" said Harry, in a low tone.

And he answered aloud:

"Ay, ay, sir. Haul over the jib and back the fore-topsail!"

A low order and the watch below were warned

to be ready to stand to quarters, and the gunners stood to the battery next the cutter, which was not a cable's length off the weather beam.

A boat with six men at the oars and a uniformed officer in the stern was seen coming from the cutter, which lay with her jib-sheet drawn over and her mainsail flattened in—all the sail she had set.

Springing on board, the officer stood aghast as he looked at the guns ready for use and the deck full of armed men, with more coming from below.

"Isn't this the Snow-Bird packet, from Halifax?" he asked, in wonder.

"No, sir—she is not. You stand on the deck of the United States private armed letter of marque—Red Gauntlet!"

"Great Moses! The Red Privateer! Cutter—"

"Silence—alarm your vessel and we sink her where she lays!" cried Harry. "Do you not see my men are at their guns, match in hand?"

"Yes—I surrender! But what fools we were! We saw you before dark. Was sure you were the Snow-Bird and just laid for you!"

"Well, sir, you've found us. Now I'll fill away and find your craft!"

In a minute, by a skillful turn of the helm and an order to the sail-trimmers, the schooner forged ahead and alongside of the cutter. It was done so quickly, thirty men were on her deck, with Seth Coffin and the Chevalier Duval in charge, before the captain of the cutter dreamed of danger.

Foolishly he tried to resist when it was too late, and was treated to a neat sword-thrust from the chevalier which disabled him, and a couple of his men were knocked down by Seth Coffin, because they tried to spring to the arm-rack on the cabin-truck for weapons.

A cutter of fifty tons, with a crew of twenty-five men, was not a prize that Harry Brent cared to hold.

Finding that land was in sight to the southeast, he gave the Englishmen their two boats, with oars, but neither sails nor arms, and told them to pull for land. Then, going on board the cutter, he took some arms and stores which he thought might be useful, and calling his carpenters aboard, he had the craft scuttled.

He lay by for a half-hour and saw her go to the bottom. He preferred this way of destroying her, to using fire, as the sight of flames might betray his presence where he did not desire it.

After the cutter sunk, he made all sail and headed for the Great River, where he intended to do a daring deed, and either force a big ransom or make a flame which could be seen a hundred miles or more, and which would strike terror to every settlement on the shores of that vast stream.

All night he stood on, nothing occurring to vary his speed or course, and when day dawned, prominent headlands told him where he was and that by night he would be near his destination, though he knew not what detention might occur before he reached what he intended should be the limit of his cruise in that direction.

He passed several vessels, at a distance during the day, some appearing to be fishermen, others lumber-laden and outward bound. Wearing the English flag at his gaff so as to create no alarm, he kept on, for he had bigger game ahead than those he was passing.

It was after midnight when the lights of a village shone out on the right shore of the great river up which he sailed, and he knew by his course and the distance run it was the place he intended to visit.

From a boat he hailed, as he anchored close off the town, he learned that Mr. Drummond, the millionaire lumberman, whose ships he had bonded, and who owned the whole town now close at hand, great mills, rafts of lumber and ships then loading at the wharves, was not only at home, but was giving a great fête in honor of the birthday of his only son.

Harry, not even consulting his officers, decided on a daring act. Laying his schooner broadside on, not a pistol-shot from shore, with his guns all loaded—anchored by kedges head and stern, he gave orders for Seth Coffin to hold her ready for instant action.

Then taking his largest boat with fifteen men armed with pistols and cutlasses he pushed off and landed. Leaving five men to guard the boat, he moved rapidly on to the mansion pointed out as Drummond Hall, and without being seen until he was in the midst of revelry, he found himself in a dining-hall where full fifty gentlemen and ladies were at supper, in the very height of festive pleasure.

A trembling servant pointed out Mr. Drummond, his son and some half-dozen English noblemen guests at the head of the table.

As Harry and his men rushed forward with drawn weapons, they covered these notable persons, and so awed the terrified crowd that while women fainted, the men unarmed, supposing this but the advance of a large force, surrendered on the instant.

Harry did not pause for thought or reaction. He instantly marched twelve of the most notable of all to his boat, and while the village, all alarmed, was a whirlpool of fear and excite-

ment, took them off on board the Red Gauntlet.

There they had a chance to see the stern men, match in hand, stand to guns which could in an instant shower death and destruction among the people on shore.

"What does all this mean? In the name of wonder *who* are you and *what* are you?" asked Mr. Drummond, as he stood with the other prisoners, guarded by the fierce-looking Chevalier Duval and some of his marines in the great cabin of the schooner.

"Have you ever heard the name of Red Gauntlet, the American privateer?" asked young Brent.

"We have! We have!" came from nearly every lip, Mr. Drummond being first to speak.

"Then know that you stand on her deck. Your town is at my mercy, for if denied the ransom I demand, I will fire all the property I can see, destroy all who dare lift a hand to save or resist, and I will carry you to prison to share the fate of men who now suffer in British dungeons. I hold bonds of two ships of yours now which I allowed to go on their voyage, intending to collect their ransom here. And it must be paid, and within three hours, or I show you what an American can do to return outrage for outrage in reprisal for what has occurred on our own coasts."

"We are in your power! Name your terms and we will at least try to accede if we can," said Mr. Drummond.

"Two hundred thousand pounds—one million of dollars in our national coin, will save your town, your mills, and secure the bonds I now exhibit to you," said the young hero.

"Impossible. I have not that amount in my treasure-boxes!" cried the great dealer.

"Your tables groan with silver plate. I saw the gleam of diamonds among the glossy silks and satins on many a fairy form. Gold or silver in coin, plate or jewels—it matters not how it comes—I have named my price! Choose between it and ruin, for if I give your property to the flames, I send a hundred armed and desperate men on shore to pillage while they burn, and you know such men spare no life that is in their way."

"Give me but twenty-four hours!" said Mr. Drummond, in an agony of fear.

"No, sir; no time to call for help to resist me. I said three hours, *too leniently*. I reduce it to *two* now, and will not wait an instant longer!"

"We yield—let me go on shore to gather up the amount as best I can," said Mr. Drummond.

"Under guard, yes; leaving your son and all these gentlemen as hostages."

"I can do no better as I see," said the unhappy millionaire.

"Chevalier Duval with two boats, ten armed men in each, go to the shore with Mr. Drummond. From each boat take three men only; leave the rest on guard at the landing. Go with Mr. Drummond to collect this ransom, three men on either side. At the least sign of treachery *slay him* and come back to me—do you understand?"

"I do, monsieur mon capitaine."

"Then go at once. I know you will do your duty."

Mr. Drummond, with a woebegone look, followed the fierce-looking officer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFRICA ASTONISHED—SPARKLE'S PERIL.

"GOSH all hemlock! This gettin' out at daylight, on a foggy mornin', to make up to a molasses-colored wench, isn't as nice as *he'll* have it when he makes love to Miss Lucille! I wish the captain had taken this part o' the work on himself!"

Thus Nicodemus Sparkle grumbled, when, in obedience to orders from his new master—for master in every sense the latter was—he stood near the market in front of the low tippling shop where Clamora, Mr. Brent's cook, generally stopped for a sip of gin when she came to get marketing for breakfast.

She was a bright and rather dressy mulatto of middle age, and, like most family servants of her race, thought a good deal of herself and held her head high over what she termed "black trash." She was a "cuddled oman," not a negro, by any means. She had often seen Nicodemus at the house of Mr. Brent, knew he was a clerk at the store, and had not yet heard of his disgrace and discharge, for servants are seldom made aware of anything in the family outside their own peculiar department.

"Mornin', Mars' Parkle," she said, shaking her turbaned head so her large gold earrings fairly rung against her cheek-bones. "You's up airy, for a white gen'leman!"

"Yes, Miss Clamora! How bright you look this morning. The fresh air and a walk does you good as well as me!"

"It jest *does*, Mars' Parkle. I feel jest as spry as a yearlin' colt!"

"Wouldn't a drop of good Holland gin make you feel a little better, Miss Clamora? I was just going in here to take some!"

"Fo' de lan' sake, Mars' Parkle! You's

berry kind. I does like a drap o' gin, now an' den, suah! An' when I does take it, it's jest about dis time o' day. Den I gets a sip o' coffee in de market, an' ole missis, she don't smell gin on my breff! Yah—yah!"

The last was that peculiar African laugh that it is hard to describe.

"Then come in. I'm glad to have a chance to treat. I always liked you, Miss Clamora, you are so much the superior of other servants about town!"

"Go 'way now! He—he! You's jest jokin', Mars' Parkle!"

"Ne'er a joke. I'm in earnest, Miss Clamora—will you have sugar in yours?"

They stood before the bar in the low dingy room, and poor Nicodemus shivered as he poured down a glass of stuff that tasted more like turpentine than anything else.

"When is your birthday, Miss Clamora?" continued Nicodemus, when they got outside the noisome den.

"It's come an' gone, Mars' Parkle, day 'fore yesterday! I'se jest forty y'ar ole!"

"Gracious! You don't look over five-and-twenty. Now I meant to buy you a new dress for your birthday, Miss Clamora. No matter—it isn't too late now. Here are five silver dollars—you're a better judge of what you'd like than I, and you can buy it yourself."

"De good Lor! You doesn't mean all dat fo' me, Mars' Parkle?"

"I do—I've always liked you, Miss Clamora, but I didn't dare to show it up at the house, you know. Get the dress, for my sake, but don't tell anybody in all the world. And I'll see you here to-morrow morning and we will have another talk. That is, if you are willing!"

"Jest as if I *wouldn't* be, when you've done been so good to me. I'll be har', bright an' airy, Mars' Parkle, an' it'll be my treat de nex' time."

"Thank you, Miss Clamora. And bring a sample of what you've chosen for a dress—though I'm no judge, I know you are. Good-morning—I must go to my breakfast."

"Morning, Mars' Parkle—your jest de niceest white gen'leman I ebber did see."

And Clamora frisked off with her head so high she ran over a half dozen little darkies before she got to the fish-market.

"Gosh all hemlock! If this isn't *earning* an increase of salary, I don't know what is," groaned Nicodemus as he walked up the street till he came to one of the town pumps.

There was a battered tin cup hanging by a chain to the spout. Into it he pumped some water and rinsed out his mouth.

"Me—Nicodemus Sparkle, Esquire, with over two hundred dollars in my pocket at this blessed minute, making love to a yaller nigger forty years old. I ought to get another good kicking. But *he'd* kill me if I backed out. I daren't do that. The next thing, I s'pose, I'll have to court her in the kitchen, when the folks are abed and asleep and I've got her to *p'ison* the watch-dog. And if the old beast *does* love me—*pooh!* I may have to kiss her, or have her liver-colored mouth stuck to mine. Gosh all hemlock—what for was I ever born? But I'm *harnessed*, and I've got to pull, or lose my fodder."

Having washed his mouth out thoroughly, so as to eradicate the taste of that horrid gin, Nicodemus walked on, cogitating over his future course.

He had not noticed in his eagerness to get through an unpleasant task, that while he was talking in low, confidential tones to the cook, a tall man in a suit of blue, with a brass star on his breast, was watching him closely from across the street, and that he crossed over and looked in while Sparkle drank with and treated the mulatto woman.

This man, with an official staff in his hand, was now following him at a short distance, never losing sight of him, and as he drew further up-town closing fast at his heels.

Nicodemus was in serious peril—but he did not know it.

Recently British emissaries, it was supposed, had been creating discontent among the negroes in many parts of the country. And there had been fears that revolts would take place, and the Committees of Safety all over the land had been instructing their officers to keep a strict watch over the negroes, and to arrest every white man not known as a master and owner of slaves who was seen holding any conference with them.

And poor Nicodemus, ever doomed to trouble, had not only been seen talking with one, but treating and drinking with her in a den patronized only by negroes.

Mr. Sparkle had just reached the door leading to his lodgings when a grasp heavy as if the hand was iron clutched his shoulder, and a stern voice cried out:

"I arrest you in the name and power of the law."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GOLDEN ARGUMENTS—TRIUMPHANT JUSTICE.

"GOSH all hemlock! I'm a lost and ruined man—a poor orphan wrecked on the cruel tide o' fate!" gasped poor Sparkle.

"I reckon that's just about the size of it!" said the officer. "See how *these* will fit."

And he produced a pair of handcuffs from a capacious pocket.

"Oh, don't, *don't* put them on me! I haven't stole nothin'!" shrieked Nicodemus.

"What is the matter down there?" called a voice from the window above, and Nicodemus recognized the voice of his employer.

It sounded almost angelic in his ears just then.

"Oh, save me—save me, captain! This officer has just arrested me, and I don't know what for!"

"You'll know soon enough when I land you in the lock-up!" said the officer, harshly.

"Bring him up-stairs, officer, and let me know what he has done. Though he is my secretary, if he has done any wrong, I will be the last to protect him."

The speaker held a gold-piece up where the officer saw it.

"It's ag'in' my custom to be slack with a prisoner, but I'll accommodate one as *seems* to be a gentleman," said the officer, much softened in tone by the sight of that piece of gold.

"Go on up, but *mark* ye, man, if you try to escape, I've a *barker* in my pocket that carries an ounce o' lead. And when I fire I shoot to *kill!*"

"I'll not offer to go till you tell me!" whined the terror-stricken craven.

A minute after both stood in Sparkle's room. The captain had not yet changed the name on his trunks, which were in the front room, and he did not care to have an officer see them. He *might* be looking for that name—*Le Clare*.

"What has this man been doing, officer?" asked the latter, and he extended the hand with the gold-piece in it.

The hand was lowered to his side empty, when the officer answered:

"He's been breakin' the *law*, sir! Conspirin' with niggers, sir! I saw him with my own eyes talkin' to a wench and treatin' her in a gin-shop and a-drinkin' with her. And he'll be sot to breakin' stone for a year, after he's been put in the pillory and *whipped*—forty lashes, save one! That's the law, sir!"

"Mercy! I'd rather *die*! Shoot me now!" moaned poor Nicodemus.

"Silence, sir!" thundered the captain.

Then, turning from the weeping clerk, he said:

"Officer, did any one else in an *official* position but you see this occurrence?"

"I don't think there did—in fact I know there's no one else around the market at this time in the morning."

"Aren't you a little troubled with a short memory?"

A second piece of gold coin came out of the speaker's pocket and was held where the officer could see it.

"Sometimes!" said the officer, smiling.

"Couldn't you overlook this misdemeanor? He was on a little spree yesterday, and I'll wager this gold-piece against one of your buttons he will never be so foolish again, and you can hold the stakes!"

"I'll take the bet and try him, for *this* time!" said the officer, his tone now low and pleasant. "But he must be careful, and if he wants to treat a nigger he must see first there are no '*stars*' in sight. He mightn't get off so easy, with *some* that are on the force. I always like to oblige a *real* gentleman, and he is lucky to have one for his employer."

The officer put his handcuffs in his pocket to keep company with his gold, and left. Nicodemus, pale and sick at heart, sat down.

"I never was so scared in all my life!" he said, by way of explaining his weakness.

He could scarcely stand on his feet.

"So, you've seen the cook then?"

This was the captain's first question.

"Yes, sir—and you see what came of it. I knew there was such a law, but I never thought of it while I was talking to her. I got on first-rate, and tickled her half to death with a present, and was to see her to-morrow morning to get her mind ready for your plans, but I reckon I'll have to stop now!"

"Not so—you will keep right on, as you have begun!"

"Gosh all hemlock! Keep on and get arrested again?"

"Fool! Do you think this man would touch you *now*? He struck a gold-mine, and is bought off. And now—I want you to tell me how soon you can so gain her confidence, or affection, I care not which, as to induce her to seek her freedom by carrying out our plans. For we'll take her with us, to wait on her mistress when we get to sea!"

"If I'm not bothered any more, it will not take long. She is an awful proud wench, and thinks herself away ahead of other colored folks. I believe she'll take anything I say for truth, because I've always been more polite to her than most of our men from the store were!"

"I'll be on the watch after this and see you're not troubled!"

"All right, sir. I'll do my best. May I get breakfast now?"

"Yes, and order mine—coffee, toast and fresh

soft-boiled eggs only. After breakfast I have more business for you, but not in the same line."

"Gosh all hemlock! I've had enough of that for one morning!"

When the officer left the Pell street house he began to think.

Had he struck something which might pay better yet? It looked so.

For, with the keen eyes of an old and vigilant detective, which he really was, he had noticed that the man who was so free with his gold, had on false whiskers and a wig. Also, that though he wore coarse, nautical clothes he used refined language and had hands soft and fair as those of a lady.

"There's something crooked there!" he muttered, as he went on. "Both them men will bear watching. I'd report the case now, but I may strike the bloke with the wig for ten or twenty dollars more, and what I make that way is my own!"

So he passed back to his beat well satisfied with the gains of the morning.

He made another arrest a little later, and the culprit did not escape the lock-up—he was a lame negro, who couldn't run and was foolish enough to try to carry off a side of bacon from in front of a grocery.

He pleaded very hard, said that he was sick and out of work because he had been set free when his old master died and free niggers had no chance and he had a wife and two children almost starved like himself.

Justice demanded a wicked example—his pleas went for naught and he went broken-spirited to the jail in handcuffs, knowing the lash and the stone-hammer would follow.

And when his forenoon watch was over, the vigilant policeman went to a first-class restaurant and had dinner of okra soup, roast beef and mince pie, topped off with something far superior to turpentine gin.

Such is life in a well-guarded city.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TREACHERY—A CLOSE CALL—REPRISAL.

As soon as he had sent Mr. Drummond on shore, Captain Harry Brent ordered refreshments for his prisoners and treated them most courteously, saying that though their present detention was necessary, he hoped it would be brief.

They bore it with a very good grace, since they could not help themselves, but one of them, a rich old Scotchman named McLaughlin, took it on himself to read our young hero quite a lecture.

"You're over young, to be actin' so braw!" he said. "Ye are but a chiel yet an' ye may ha' many a hard lesson to learn before ye're a mon! There's them aboon the river wad make it hot, did they ken ye were here!"

Harry understood him. He had let out, perhaps without thinking, that there were foes up the river.

Harry did not wait for the danger to descend without it came very soon. It would not be daylight when his two hours were up and he meant to have his canvas spread then to the wind which made the waves dash noisily against the oaken sides of his schooner.

Every man was on duty and alert, the sails ready to hoist at a second's notice, and every gun prepared for instant use in case of need.

In less time than was given him, Mr. Drummond came off with two boats almost loaded with coin. A quantity of silver plate and several cases of rich jewelry, were also in the hands of the chevalier.

"I fear I am back nearly twenty thousand pounds yet!" said Mr. Drummond. "But if you only give me a few hours, I will raise it."

Harry, pleased with the result so far, was thinking whether to accept the delay or not, when Seth Coffin called him on deck.

"A veiled and cloaked lady has come alongside in a canoe and wishes to see you alone. She will speak to you there!"

This was said in a whisper. Harry hurried to the side.

A lady, trembling with excitement, whose voice, full of melody, sounded to him like that of Lucille, said:

"Sir—I saw you perform your daring act to-night and I cannot bear that one so brave and handsome shall be sacrificed. Only thirty miles up the river there are three of our men-of-war at anchor—one of them the fastest corvette in the British navy."

"The moment after you left Drummond Hall, a man on horseback was sent overland to report your presence here. Wear this, in remembrance of one who risks much to serve you, and fly from here fast as you can!"

She slipped a ring on one of his fingers, and without waiting an instant to hear his reply, pushed away in her canoe and was lost in the darkness.

"Have one boat ready to land the prisoners! The treasure is all on board, is it not?"

"Yes, captin!" said Seth Coffin.

"Then hoist up the other boats and get ready to ship. It will be daylight in twenty minutes!"

Going into the cabin, he said calmly, as if not in the least hurried:

"I have decided, gentlemen, to accept the ransom already paid and to set you safely on shore. And to show you how much of a man a boy may be, I pardon the treachery which sent a courier up the river to bring three men-of-war down on me, and spare you and your homes. Good-morning! Chevalier, see your prisoners to the land and instantly return!"

"Oui, mon capitaine!"

Abashed, silent, Mr. Drummond and his friends went into the boat, which waited for them.

They were speedily set on shore, and the boat returning was hoisted to its davits.

"Up mainsail and jib! Stand by to run up kedges hand over hand—we've no time to lose!" cried Harry, taking the quarter-deck in person.

Day was breaking, clear and glorious. Fleecy streamers in the sky told that the wind would be fresh, and even then it was blowing a ten-knot breeze.

"Look there! Great Jehosaphat! We're off—but we haven't a minute to spare!" cried Seth Coffin, pointing to three large, square-rigged vessels coming down the river under all the canvas their spars would hold and not more than a long cannon-shot astern.

"Set topsail, top-gallant and royal—let the foresail out o' brails and sheet aft!" cried our hero, not a muscle quivering. "Tom Breeze—come here and tend the after pivot gun yourself!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried the noble old gunner.

"Captin—did you know they were a-comin'?" asked Seth Coffin, pointing to the war-ships astern.

"Yes—that lady told me so. One is very fast; we may have to take a mast out of her before we are clear!"

"Wal—ding my buttons, if you aren't the coolest man I ever saw afloat. I'd no idea we were in a hundred mile of any trouble. One o' them craft is fast—she's gaining on us, seems to me!"

"Set the square-sail. It will draw as well as the weather studding-sails she has out. Then throw the log and see what we're doing!"

Increased sail drove the schooner on very fast, and the log-line told twelve knots when it was tried.

Two of the British men-of-war dropped astern very fast. The next, which was near enough, Tom Breeze said, for him to reach with the after gun, kept on, but did not fire, as she would have to luff or keep away to do so, and her commander seemed bent on getting closer, where he could use his heavy guns effectively, before checking speed to fire.

"She is fast!" said Harry, as he saw that while holding his own surely, any gain on the other vessel was not perceptible.

She was large—had a topgallant and fore-castle poop deck, with guns on both, besides the lower range. She did not mount less than thirty guns and her decks seemed to swarm with men.

"Tom—feel of her! We can fire and not lose a fathom of way," cried Harry, beginning to be anxious. "Try her upper spars. Cripple some of them and all the fun is on our side."

Long and carefully Tom sighted his gun. The water was smooth, the vessel never swerved in her course—the old gunner had every chance to do well.

And he did! He fired.

The foretopmast with topgallant and royal above cut away pitched forward a wreck of confusion, with studding-sails and all coming down in a heap. The fresh breeze helped to complete the ruin.

"Give her another, Tom—she yaws to fire on us," cried Harry, clapping his hands.

As the corvette swung around to fire, Tom sent in a raking shot that must have done great damage, for at least a minute passed before she fired and that minute gave the schooner three cables' length distance, if a foot.

First two or three scattering guns—then a whole broadside came from the corvette, but every shot fell short.

"Good-by, Johnnie!" cried Harry, in triumph, and he fired a lee-gun in derision as he stood on out of all present peril.

The rearmost ships were seen closing up with their crippled consort, but the schooner was going nearly two knots to their one, and the chase was a farce.

Harry took it so coolly that an hour after he luffed alongside a large lumber ship bound out, ordered her crew into her boats to save their lives, and then fired her fore and aft.

"That is the game their ships play on our coast. We'll see how they like it here!" was his remark, as the red flames went flashing up the masts and out on the canvas-clad yards of the lumberman.

How it must have galled those British officers to have had the daring privateer almost under their guns and then to see her sweep defiantly down the great river, carrying ruin and destruction in her course, for before night hid the vessels from his sight Harry Brent had fired no less than six English ships—four outward bound and two coming in with cargoes he had no time to look after.

In each case he took no life, for there was no resistance, and sent the crews off in their own boats to tell what the Red Gauntlet had done.

That night, after setting watches—one below and one on deck, for the men needed rest, Harry went to his cabin to take a square meal for the first time in twenty-four hours.

And now he took time to look at the ring which had been pressed on his finger by the unknown lady whose friendly warning had been his salvation.

It was a seal—red cornelian, encircled with diamonds. The emblem engraved was a heart with a flame springing from it on top, and beneath the single word—"Fidelity."

"I will wear it always, in memory of this day, though it is not likely I will again ever see the one who gave it to me."

This Harry said, as he thought what might have been his fate without the warning that hurried him off.

For, after all he had done, he knew he would receive little mercy if ever he fell into British hands.

A happier set of officers and men than those on the Red Gauntlet it would have been hard to find afloat. The profits of that short cruise made almost every man feel that he was rich. For the proceeds from the fur-ship coupled with the immense amount of ransom-money were very large.

Next day many vessels were sighted, but none molested. Harry Brent argued in his mind that what he had done would start every British cruiser in the the North in search of him, and he would lose no time in getting into more healthy waters.

Besides, it ran against his better nature to continue resistless destruction. It seemed unmanly in his eyes.

Once outside the Gulf of St. Lawrence, three or four days later, he headed for Southern waters again, keeping a fair offing outside of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and again watching for British transports.

He had a short bit of fun off Halifax, but it did not amount to much. He was chased by two British men-of-war, a frigate and a heavy brig, and he let them come nearly into gunshot range before he made sail to get out of their way.

When he did, he went off so fast he seemed to leave them standing still as if at anchor. To add insult to injury, he fired a lee gun when he filled away as if he scorned to waste iron throwing it at them.

To aggravate them more, while they were yet in sight, he captured a very pretty schooner-yacht, armed with four guns, which the owner dared not use, or he would have been sunk, which had brought out a pleasure-party on its way to Anacosti.

Releasing the owner and his guests and a crew of a dozen men and putting them on board an in-bound fishing-craft, he sent his compliments to the men-of-war's-men, put a small prize crew of fifteen men and two officers on board and made her a tender to his own craft.

She was nearly seventy tons measurement, built for speed, and though not so fast as the Red Gauntlet, more speedy than most vessels they would be likely to run afoul of.

"She'll sell for a good price in the States, captin," said Seth Coffin, as he looked her over. "Her four-gun battery of twelve-pounders would do very well for salutes, but they wouldn't hurt much in the kind o' work we do."

The sailing orders to the Peirel—the name of the prize—were to keep close company with the privateer day and night, both using colored lights at night to mark their positions.

Heading down the coast, expecting to make Portland in a few days, the two vessels stood on under easy canvas, not seeing anything to haul up for, within three days after the capture.

Closing in with the coast, fishing craft were seen every day, and once or twice Harry Brent hove to on the banks to let his crew catch a supply of fish to make their salt provisions more palatable.

"We'll be in Portland inside of twenty-four hours, I think, by my reckoning!" Harry was saying to his first officer.

"I wish we were there now. We're goin' to have it hot and heavy from the nor'west, the way it looks off there!" Mr. Coffin pointed to a gray, ragged mass of clouds rising very swiftly on the horizon.

"I've felt the swell o' the storm this two hours. It's what makes this nasty cross-sea here."

"You are right, and a rock-bound coast is under our lee. I hope the prize is a weatherly craft, for if it comes too fresh we'll lay to under close reefs, head off-shore, and keep sea-room if we can!"

"I'd reef down early, sir—if I were you. We're not much outside o' soundings now, and night is nigh at hand. The yacht will have to reef closer than we—she hasn't iron enough in her to hold her up, as we have!"

"Yes, Mr. Coffin. Luff and signal to her to close in our wake. Then I'll give the orders. We'll heave to under close-reefed foresail at sunset!"

And at sunset the prophecy of Mr. Coffin was verified. They had a nor'wester, butt-end first to battle with.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONSPIRACY PROGRESSING FAST.

"PAPA, what is that little wretch, Sparkle, doing, since you discharged him? I met him to-day on the street. He was dressed like a stage dandy, and strutted along as if he owned half the town!"

"I know nothing of him, my dear!" was the answer Mr. Brent made to the question of Lucille. "He has kept out of my sight since I kicked him from the store. I suppose he saved enough from his wages to live on for a time, even if he has no employment. If he had been less insolent he would not have lost his place!"

"Is it not time the dear old commodore returned from Washington? I feel lonesome since he went away. He was so good and told so many droll stories—yarns he called them. Ah, there comes your letter-clerk from the store—I will hurry to the door to see what he wants."

She returned in a few seconds with two letters for Mr. Brent and one for herself. It was in the well-known hand of Harry.

"Read your letters, papa, first. One is from Harry, I know. I want to keep mine till I go to my room!"

"Call your mother, and I will," was his answer.

Mrs. Brent came in, and the merchant opened the letter written by Harry.

"He dates on board the Red Gauntlet, off the Gulf of St. Lawrence," he said. "He has taken a very valuable prize, and bonded two ships he captured but could not run in. The first was a Hudson Bay Company's fur ship, the cargo valued at over two hundred thousand dollars, and the ship valuable. He put a prize-crew on board and ordered her into Portland, where his letter is mailed—therefore she must be in safe. Yes—this second letter is from Josiah Nettles, second officer of the privateer, who carried the prize into port. He is to wait there for the privateer. Harry is going to make a dash up the St. Lawrence which, he thinks, will astonish me and the world. He does not explain—perhaps he'll confide his secret to you!"

"If he does, I'll keep it, papa, you may rest assured. Ah—the Washington stage stops. It is the commodore, back!"

And she ran to the door to be first to give the kiss of welcome to the old hero.

"Here I am, Carroll, like a bad penny on your hands again for a week or two!" cried the old sailor, as his brother and sister-and-law hurried to grasp his hand. "What, letters in hand? Have you news from Harry?"

"Yes, and good news. He has taken three prizes—one, very valuable, is in Portland. And he is after more!"

"The young rascal—to be making a fortune while I'm laid up in port doing nothing. Well, well, we ought not to grumble. We're taking comfort while he is tumbling about at sea, living on salt horse and hard-tack!"

"Any news in Washington?" asked the merchant.

Lucille had vanished—to read her letter alone.

"Yes—the President and his Cabinet are much worried by the fact that the enemy seem to be massing vessels and men in Southern waters as if to attack where our defenses are weakest and they can do most damage. They actually think both Washington and Baltimore in danger. I tried to get permission to get a fleet together and settle the matter in the bay or off the capes, but our little navy is so scattered they thought it impossible. So—I've got to wait till my frigate is ready for sea, and then go out and do what I can with her. If I can get three or four vessels together, they're to sail under my flag, however."

"I wish you were to stay with us, brother. If Baltimore is attacked, it will be by sea, and you would manage our batteries better than any man we have in command."

"Thankee, Carroll—I'd do my best—but isn't it near grub-time? I've not tasted food since I left Washington, and a forty-mile sail in a rickety mail-coach would make a monk hungry on a fast day!"

Dinner will be on the table in less than ten minutes," said Mrs. Brent.

At that moment Lucille rushed into the room, angry and flushed.

"Papa," she cried, "I just saw that puppy—Sparkle. I was by my window reading the letter from Harry, and happened to look across the street. There he stood, with a great hairy-faced sailor, staring right at me. The minute he saw I noticed him, he started on as fast as he could go!"

"The best thing he could do, for it saves the trouble of sending my coachman out to horse-whip him!" said Mr. Brent, laughing.

It was true. But little did Lucille Brent dream when her eyes fell on that "hairy-faced sailor," that it was the man of all men to be feared and dreaded—Le Clare.

The villain had come in person with his tool, Sparkle, to see where the chamber of the girl he meant to abduct was situated and to get a better idea of the house, so that when he came to work in the gloom of night he could find his way correctly. Fortunately for his purpose, but sadly for her, she happened to be in her room when

the two arrived in front of the house. They did not tarry after they saw her eyes had detected their presence, for they saw by her look she would give notice of it to her parents and they had no wish to be "interviewed" just then.

"Isn't she just lovely!" cried Nicodemus, as they hurried on.

His companion made no answer. He was not a man to waste words.

He did not speak until they were near where the Sally Ann lay at her wharf with a gang of riggers at work refitting her rigging, carpenters making alterations in her cabin and stavedores putting in ballast.

All this was being done at the cost of Captain Bill Masten, who had chartered her for three months, to put her in order and keep her so being a part of his agreement.

"Have you got that cook pretty well won over so she can be trusted with a knowledge of what she is to do?" at last asked Le Clare.

"I've got her wild with the idea of being free in a country where she can be looked upon as a lady. I reckon she'll do all I tell her, now. She thinks I am a bigger man than the President!"

"Then we will soon be ready to act. I've managed to put this suspicious Yankee captain on a false scent which will keep his mouth shut till after we sail. He thinks I go for a hidden treasure and he will get a share!"

"But how will you account for taking the girl with you?"

"She is a sickly, half-crazed daughter of mine, whom I have to keep closely confined and watched for fear she will destroy herself!"

"Gosh all hemlock—cap'n—you're a king for making up plans!"

"We clear for St. Kitts, and a market. That gives me scope and we also clear in Coffin's name, so his American papers make us square without we are overhauled by a British man-of-war. If we are, I have papers to carry us clear. But if the vessel is fast as she looks, we will have no trouble, for we will avoid all investigation. I have a mate who will pick a crew to suit and obey me and they are to be ready at a few hours' notice!"

"Then—I don't see what's to keep us back. The schooner will be fit for sea in four-and-twenty hours. I heard Captain Coffin say so."

"Yes, water, provisions and small stores will all be on board to-morrow!"

They were now on the wharf and the head conspirator, as Le Clare may well be termed, looked the vessel over with much satisfaction. That he was a seaman, was very certain, from the handy way he talked of spars, rigging and sails, when conversing with Captain Coffin. But as he said, he was more used to a square rig than a fore-and-aft.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN GREAT PERIL.

WHEN the Red Gauntlet and her prize, the pretty Petrel, under close-reefed foresails headed off-shore, the sun setting fiery red disclosed just under its rim the rough outlines of a rocky coast.

The wind had freshened to a sharp gale, but both vessels held up to it prettily, head-reaching a little even in the heavy sea that came rolling in.

"I will fire a rocket or show a blue light every half hour, so you can see where I am, and not lose company," was the last instruction Captain Brent gave to the officer in charge of the prize. "Answer each time and keep a light in your fore rigging each side."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the prompt reply.

To a landsman such a gale as now rose higher and higher every hour would have seemed terrible. But to a sailor, as long as his ship rode dry over the great inrolling surges and made weather off-shore instead of drifting alee, it was only pastime. Its shrill shriek is music to his ear—he looks calmly on straining shrouds and bending spar, knowing they are strong and will bear the strain.

The watch below sleep all the deeper in their storm-rocked hull, the men on deck smoke, draw up under the weather rail for shelter from the spray, and spin yarns about the jolly times on shore and talk about what they'll do when the cruise is over. On the tempest-lashed sea they fear no danger—it is only the shore they dread.

Utter darkness soon hid each vessel from the other. The lookout only kept the twinkling lights in view that told one how near the other was. At half-hour intervals a rocket shot up through the gloom, and sometimes far and faint, again nearer and brighter, the answer would shoot up on high.

All night, heading off, pitching and tossing on a sea as high as the mast-heads—now low in the hollow, then up in the foam on the wave-crests, the stanch vessels battle with the storm.

When day dawned, Seth Coffin on watch, had his young captain called on deck.

"We've got a screamer in our teeth, cap'ting."

He had to shout to be heard, though his mouth was close to his young commander's ear.

The latter looked anxious. The Petrel, her decks all awash, lay off but a cable's length on their beam, still standing staunchly to her work, but astern far more close than it had been at

sunset, appeared the black, rugged coast which they had most to fear.

"We'll have to make sail and claw off-shore," he shouted to Seth.

"It'll do to talk about—maybe to try—but I don't think we can drag a foot more o' canvas, cap'ting."

Close-hauled as they were—with only a little sail exposed, the gale almost tore that little from the bending masts.

"Then what can we do?"

"Take the glass and look sharp in-shore—about three points westerly of our wake."

"It looks as if there was a group of small islands in there," said Harry, after a long and close observation.

"Jest so! And inside o' there is our best chance while we've good light to see our way in. If we get smooth water and room to drop our anchors, all right. We're driftin' in, do the best we can and I think a current sets that way."

Harry went up a little way in the rigging, and it was all he could do to hold fast and use his glass.

When he came down he shouted to Coffin:

"You are right. I'll risk it. Stand by to ease off and put the helm up."

Getting a trumpet, he stood ready to hail the Petrel when she wore around and passed her.

It was dangerous to wear in such a fearful sea—more dangerous to lay off till driven where they could not help themselves.

"Watch the chance and up helm when she is rising on a sea!" was the order now given.

"There it is—hard up and slack away fore-sheet!"

As she rose she began to swerve in her course, and when the full force of the gale caught the bellying sail on the crest of the foamy surge she flew around so fast that it required "Hard-alee!" to check her when she got before it.

"Beautifully done; run just to port of the Petrel!" shouted Harry, using the trumpet.

"Follow us to an anchorage!" was the order he gave as they shot swiftly by the Petrel.

They could see her two helmsmen lashed to the wheel, her officers and crew clinging to life-lines and rigging.

They were in a craft so small that every sea drenched her decks fore and aft. But, with hatches battened down, they were braving it out.

A couple of minutes while his own vessel was shooting forward either to safety or sure destruction—there was no middle choice—Harry looked back.

He feared the yacht never could live in that sea, that she would go over on her beam-ends when she tried to bear off in the terrible blast.

"She is around! She is in our wake!" he said at last, as he saw her far astern coming like a frightened bird down before the gale.

Now it was time to look to his own craft.

With lightning speed she rushed toward that black jagged line of rock over which the surges threw cataracts of foam.

Seth Coffin had gone forward with a second spy-glass in his hand, and from time to time waved his hand in the way the helmsmen should hold their course.

Nearer and nearer—now they could see scraggy cedars and pines on the high cliffs, now it seemed as if one long line of breakers without a single opening was before them.

Harry stood firm, but his face was white, not with fear, but the thought that all he had striven for might in an instant be swallowed in those hungry surges. They were within less than half a mile—no opening yet.

"We are lost," thought Harry, but he did not say so.

White and stern, far out on the bowsprit, holding by the jib-stay, stood Seth Coffin, his hat blown away left his long, yellow hair streaming in the wind, every dip in the sea he went to his waist in water, but there he hung looking for a channel—their only chance for life.

Oh, what a scene for an artist's hand!

Suddenly—scarce a short rifle-shot from breakers whose roar out-thundered every other sound—with a shrill, unearthly cadence Seth shouted: "Port—port hard!"

And with his hand he signed also how he wished the sharp prow laid.

The helmsman heard, saw and obeyed, and in less than a minute more, with great surges leaping mast-head high on either side, the schooner luffed through a channel scarce thrice her own width and ran into a dead calm behind a lofty island.

"A boat, with two signal-flags, quick!" shouted Seth Coffin, as they rounded to, and even before an anchor could be dropped the boat was lowered and he and three men in it.

Harry knew the brave fellow was doing right whatever it was, but he asked no questions and had the best bower dropped to hold his schooner safe in her new harbor.

Then he looked around and saw that Seth had landed a man to scale the rock to the west of the channel to show a flag, while he, in the seething channel itself, went out as far as he dared to show with his flag where the yacht must steer for safety.

And she, not a quarter of an hour behind, ow-

ing all to this quick precaution, came sweeping in, her crew exhausted—not a man who could have lived another day and night out, like the last.

The scene was bleak and barren—but it looked like Paradise to those storm-beaten men.

A half-dozen rocky islands—small, crowned with dwarfed and scraggy pine and cedar trees—a reef that separated them from the main by scarce a cable's length of water—only one channel of entrance and exit, it seemed a *miracle* by which they found it.

And while the ragged clouds flew fast and furious overhead, while the surges roared so near and loud they almost deafened every ear, there, they lay becalmed in water smooth and transparent as the crystal breast of an ice-bound lake.

"Capturing—we're safe, and I thank the good Father above for it!" said Seth Coffin, when he came on board. "But there's a sail outside that's in as bad a fix as we were or worse, for I think she's dismayed by the glimpse I got outside as the yacht drove in by me!"

"I'll take a glass and go to the top of yonder rock and see what she is. Turn the men to, to breakfast, and then clear up decks and snug up a little!"

And Harry sprung into the boat alone, took an oar and sculled to the island rock which rose between them and the ocean.

He went up to the highest point, where the wind blew so he had to cling to the stunted trees that bent almost to the rocks among which they rooted.

And he saw a sight which made him forget how near he, too, had been to death a brief half-hour before.

A great black hull—a large ship, every mast gone close to her deck except a short stump of the foremast, on which a sail, so small he could just see it, was set—heading off-shore, but rolling in on every sea, toward sure destruction. And her decks were full of men.

Something fluttered from a smaller staff, or spar, aft. At first he could not make it out. Then, through mist and spray, he made out colors—a flag.

Nearer and nearer to her doom! He could see the ports and even the muzzles of two tiers of guns. And as a frigate, three or four hundred men at least were there to form a crew.

CHAPTER XL.

AN ENGLISH ADMIRAL ASTONISHED—OUR HERO'S GLORY.

As the dismayed hull came yet nearer Harry Brent plainly saw the colors flutter out on the staff at the stern. They were *English*, and *Union down!*

"Enemies to my country and to me!" he said. "Must I let them perish when perhaps an act of mine could save them? They are *men* and they drift helplessly to death, for if the ship strikes no man will ever reach the shore alive!"

Only for a minute did he hesitate.

Hurrying down to his boat he sculled to the schooner fast as he could.

"Put a double charge in the forward pivot gun and fire as soon as it is loaded—an alarm gun!" he cried.

Then turning to Mr. Coffin he said:

"Put a white flag on a spare royal mast and send two men to the top of the rock nearest the channel, to hold it up as a signal to the ship outside. Get me another flag for my boat and a crew of eight of the best men. I'm going to try to save that vessel—she is helpless almost, and lost if she cannot bear off to our channel and get in!"

"Let me go, captain! It is risky out there among the rollers!"

"No, Mr. Coffin—not I will send no man where I dare not go myself!"

By the time the great gun with its double charge roared out its signal, the white flag floated from the rocks and Harry Brent, with another flag hoisted in his boat, was as far out amid the seething breakers in the mouth of the channel as his boat could go and live.

The dismayed ship was not over a half-mile out. That the gun was heard on board and the signals seen was almost instantly proved.

The great hull was seen to wear, and under her scant sail came rushing down toward the coast, while men on her decks waved their hats and seemed transformed from despair to hope.

Harry, standing erect in his boat, waved his flag to show them where the channel was, and though he could hear no sound but the awful din of the breaking surges, he knew by their action the men he sought to save were cheering, for their ship had steering-way, and was coming swift and straight for the only spot she could find that did not mark wreck and ruin for them all.

One breathless minute more, and barely missing his boat though he pulled aside, the great hull rushed through the boiling mass of spray and foam and rounded to in the sheltered harbor just beyond his schooner.

Her anchor plunged down and her great cable ran through the hawse-hole, as Harry Brent pulled to her side.

The next instant he was on her quarter-deck, where a gray-haired officer in an admiral's uni-

form stood, with a large number of officers all around him.

"Young sir—I owe this ship and all these lives to your noble action. But for your signal gun and pilot flags we would all have been lost! God alone can reward you—man's richest gifts can never speak our gratitude!"

And before all his officers and men he threw his arms about Harry's neck and kissed him.

Young Brent stood, pale and trembling. He was on the deck of a British ship-of-war. Four hundred officers and men were gathered around cheering as if their throats would burst.

As soon as there was a moment of silence, Harry Brent said, pointing to his schooner and her flag, to his deck where all his crew stood at quarters, called there by Seth Coffin, who knew not what to do:

"Sir—when you see that flag and know who I am, though you have batteries which can sink us where we lay, perhaps you will not be so profuse in your remarks! I command the *Red Gauntlet*, American privateer!"

"What, Captain Harry Brent who captured the *Lion* and treated my son Geoffry Parker so kindly and so well? I am yet more indebted to you, sir, and were I sure of England's crown by firing one gun against you here—I would not do it. The will of Him who creates storms and can calm the sea when'er He lists, has brought us together."

"While here—the white flag that's floating on yonder rock gave us a sign of hope, when despair held every soul, shall be the emblem of peace and good will between us. If I had a boat left, I would go on board your famous and beautiful vessel, place myself in your power and show you how I trusted one who can be generous and humane, as he is valiant in action!"

To say that Harry Brent was not deeply touched with these words would be to utter an untruth.

While his father was speaking, young Parker, who had been exchanged at New York for a United States officer of his rank in the British fleet, stepped forward to grasp our hero by the hand. He was yet thin and pale from the effect of the wound he had received in the battle in the Montauk Channel, but Harry instantly recognized him.

After greeting him, he tendered Admiral Parker and his officers the use of one of his best boats and asked them to come, as many as could leave their duty at a time, on board his vessel to enjoy the best he had to entertain them with.

The invitation was accepted by the admiral and his immediate staff and as soon as they could arrange their storm-beaten uniforms they joined him in his own boat.

Seth Coffin had waited in suspense with his men at quarters all this time, for he could not realize there could be peace while those two flags floated over opposite decks. But when he saw Harry chatting and laughing with unarmed British officers coming to the schooner in his own boat, he piped the men below, allowing only the chevalier to remain above with his marines, as a guard of honor to salute the officers of rank whose uniform he saw.

A roll of the drum and the sharp order from chevalier:

"*Present arms!*"

told the admiral that his rank was honored, and when he entered the cabin of the schooner he said:

"Captain Brent, I had rather be here this day than in my own castle in England or in the proudest palace in all Europe. I say this not in flattery, but as one who owes his life and the lives of four hundred brave officers and men to your courage and forethought. I was on my way to Halifax, to resign my command and take ship for home, and I say to you, may my right hand wither if it ever draws a sword against the flag of him who saved us all this day!"

"I could do no less," said Harry, very deeply affected by this declaration. "I could not see my fellow-men drift down upon a certain death and not lift a hand to save them."

"And, admiral, it is in my power to do something to add to your comfort and to relieve you from a most unpleasant position. You are without boats and spars to extricate your ship from this harbor when this storm is blown out, as it soon will be. I have close alongside a prize I captured off Halifax a few days since, the yacht *Petrel*, large enough to carry you and such men and officers as you wish to that port. I will surrender her to you for that purpose, and pledge my honor that I will not when I leave here give any notice that will bring any of our vessels here to capture your ship in her crippled state. You can go to Halifax in the yacht and send spars here to re-rig and refit your ship."

"It is generous. But while I accept this noble offer, I shall insist on giving my bond, that my Government shall not only pay the full value of the prize you return to us, but also give you and your brave officers and crew salvage for the ship you saved. To this, I will take no denial."

Harry could but accede in justice to his owners and crew but it was far more than he expected.

Refreshed with the best young Brent could

have set before them, the admiral returned to his ship to let his people know their chance of speedy relief from their disabled position.

Recalling his prize crew from the yacht, Harry Brent had her turned over to the admiral and placed at his entire disposal at once.

For three days yet the storm lashed the outside ocean into fury. And during those three days the officers of both vessels and the crews mingled with as much friendly courtesy as if war had never existed between the nations.

Even the Chevalier Duval seemed to forget, for the time his hatred to "*les bas Anglais*," and acted like the noble and true gentleman that he was.

And when at last, on the morning of the fourth day, wind and sea so fell that it was safe to go outside, the admiral and his officers parted with Harry Brent, as *friends* who would never in life forget his manly kindness.

While the yacht with Admiral Parker's flag at the main stood out for Halifax, Harry Brent headed the *Red Gauntlet* for Portland, where he hoped to find letters from those he loved.

Light and baffling winds followed the gale, and it was six and thirty hours after he left his Island Refuge, as their last harbor was named, when he slipped in past Cape Elizabeth and entered the finest harbor on the coast, the spacious bay of Portland.

He had hardly straightened his cable at anchor, when Josiah Nettles came off from shore, bringing him three letters, one from his father, a second from his uncle, a third from Lucille.

Why—I beg the reader to explain the cause, for I will not try—Harry opened Lucille's letter first, is the question.

He did so and though his face wore a flush of pleasure while his eye scanned her lines, once in a while his brow would darken with a frown. For the good girl told of her troubles, as well as her joys and how she had been annoyed by the attentions, and the final threats of the dark-visaged man who had called himself Le Clare.

"If you were here, I would have no fear," she said—"no, not if twenty such as he threatened my peace. But the peril you dreamed of seems centered in him—I cannot keep the wretch out of my mind!"

The close of her letter gave his mind some ease.

She said:

"Papa tells me he thinks Le Clare has left the town surely. Suspected as a British spy, the Committee of Safety were after him and would have arrested him had he stayed."

The letter from his father made Harry smile more than once:

"Here am I, an old battered hulk, laid on my beam's-end, waiting for a chance to do *something* before I die, and there you are getting famous and rich, hand over hand, while the best and prettiest girl in all the States loves you better than a bo's'n loves his grog."

This was one paragraph. Another told the boy how well he stood at Washington, where promotion awaited him whenever he returned to the regular service.

The letter from his uncle while full of kindness and trust, made Harry thoughtful and sad.

It spoke of the state of the war, and the great probability that both Washington and Baltimore would be attacked—perhaps captured by the enemy.

"I shall try to get your aunt and Lucille off into the interior before the crisis," he said—"but you have the Brent blood and know I will not leave and let others fight while my property is endangered as well as theirs. Your father will soon be on his ship and here we will do the best we can. Baltimore is all alive to her honor and she will be defended by her sons so long as they have life to stand to their guns!"

Harry felt more anxiety than he dared express in his replies to these letters, but he was glad to tell his uncle that if adverse fate robbed him in Baltimore, that if the enemy impoverished him there, the *Red Gauntlet* was fast amassing a fortune for him as owner.

He tried to encourage Lucille, and for the first time avowed a love which grew stronger and deeper as absence made her memory his sole comfort. He would so honor her by his acts and his faithful devotion, that he could hope for a return of his affection when the tide of war turned and he could return once more and enjoy the charms of her presence. He inclosed in his letter a costly diamond ring which he prayed she would wear in token of his endless love.

He would remain in Portland long enough to get an answer to his letters.

Portland, through its authorities and all its crowds of patriotic people, received the *Red Gauntlet* and her officers with as much honor as had been evinced at Baltimore and New London, and Harry had all he could do to accept proffered honors and refit his vessel for another cruise.

He was undecided in his mind whether to hover off the Capes of Virginia for awhile and there to damage the enemy all he could, or to boldly cross to the English coast and make another surprise such as he had created in the St. Lawrence.

But as events in life are shaped by a Provi-

dence which works with a mysterious hand, so dark deeds were culminating, which would shape his future course in spite of all other plans.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CONSPIRACY'S RESULT.

"THE schooner is ready," said Captain "Bill Masten," looking more pleasant than he had ever appeared before, when he addressed Sparkle. "The wind too is fresh from the westward. The crew are all on board—papers right, we have nothing to keep us back if you do your part well. If the woman Clamora is faithful, by ten o'clock this night everyone in that house but herself will be buried in sleep. Prepared food and drink will make them oblivious to our pretty game."

"Before midnight our white-winged courser will bear us down the bay at a rate which will defy pursuit."

"I'll do my part, sir—to be sure. I will earn the ten thousand pounds you promised me in the end. For when I have that I'll be an 'Esquire' and all Hades can't stop it. Gosh all hemlock! I'll shine in French broadcloth and morocco boots every day of my life!"

"Well—to your work and see the woman at once!"

"Hadn't he better see me first? He's been runnin' his little love game with that wench about long enough! I've been on his track sharp, and it's about time he paid the fiddler if he's to keep up the dance!"

The old police officer stood on the threshold of the room, for the door had been left ajar. It was he who thus spoke in a tone of bitter sarcasm.

Le Clare, or Masten, saw that rocks were ahead, and if he wanted to clear the breakers, he had got to pay pilot fees.

"It is right. The fiddler shall be paid, but he must let the dance go on, for my poor secretary is stuck hard on the shoal of love and I haven't the heart to desert him in his misery. How much do you want, Mr. Officer, this time? Be lenient, for the goose that lays golden eggs is not found every day."

"I know that, sir, and she may take wings and sail away. You see I'm posted, don't you?"

"Yes—yes! Name your price, and after that close your eyes and let us alone."

"Five hundred dollars in gold will pass you clear of all trouble. No one but me has piped you."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. Do you think I'd be so weak as to take a partner in a soft job like this?"

"I'm glad to hear it. Come in and take a glass of porter while I count out the money. Sit down—I will get it in a minute."

The officer entered, closed the door and took a seat by the table on which stood bottles and glasses.

Le Clare passed behind him and lifted the lid of a trunk which had the name of Masten on one end in big white letters.

Nicodemus opened a bottle of porter and poured out a glass for the officer.

The latter had just raised it to his lips, when he received a stunning blow from a short, heavy club under his ear which sent him completely unconscious to the floor.

"Gosh all hemlock, cap'n—you've killed him!" groaned Nicodemus, frightened almost to death.

"It would be a small matter, and not the first one, if I had. But he is only stunned. Get me some strong cord—there is a roll in that trunk—and that piece of firewood for a gag. His own handcuffs will hold his hands powerless behind his back. With his feet tied firmly together, then he'll be safe in my bed for the next four and twenty hours, for no one will be apt to look for him there with the key in my pocket. And before twenty-four hours we'll be a hundred miles at sea, and you may have the five hundred he wanted."

"Gosh all hemlock! You're a king, cap'n! I never heard of a man like you."

While he talked, the captain worked.

Before he was conscious the officer, secured hand and foot, gagged so he could make no noise, lay bound on the bed of his captor, covered with bedclothes with only room for his face left exposed so he could breathe.

For the villain who had foiled him did not wish to risk a murder just then, lest it might come back on him when he would least want such a charge hovering around.

The instant all was secure Le Clare had his trunks set out and bade Nicodemus have them carted to the schooner, which lay ready to sail at ten minutes' warning at her wharf.

The day had nearly passed and the night was at hand when the darkest deed of all was to be executed, or at least attempted.

And it came on dark and stormy, just the weather for evil men and evil deeds. A night when watchmen keep close in shelter, when no one walks the street save those driven there by some stern necessity, and such are "few and far between."

In the Brent mansion all was bright and quietly pleasant. At his usually late supper

hour, Mr. Brent with the commodore was discussing the daring acts of Harry in the St. Lawrence, which they had just heard of, and his noble conduct in saving the lives of his endangered enemies, which had been so justly rewarded and acknowledged by Admiral Parker.

"Lucille is giving us something extra in honor of the occasion," said Mrs. Brent, as they all sat down to the table. "She and the cook in addition to our usual fare have dressed a delicious salad of which Mr. Brent is very fond."

"I'm sharp set on salad, too," said the commodore.

"We all like it, and I took great pains to make the dressing strong and nice," said Lucille. "Papa likes a great deal of mustard and cayenne, and I always dress it strong."

"The coffee, too, is strong and bitter—a little more cream in mine," said her father.

The supper was excellent—the good news had given them all sharp appetites, and justice was done to everything on the table.

After supper Lucille excused herself. She wanted to write to Harry, so as to send her letter by the early mail next day. The old commodore felt tired and very sleepy, so he was soon off to his chamber.

Mr. Brent and his wife went into his library, she to read and he to write to his nephew. A drowsy feeling came over him, but he wrote on till he was so sleepy he could hardly hold his pen. He turned to speak to Mrs. Brent, and saw she was sound asleep in her chair, book in hand. He tried to rise, but overpowering sleep was on him also, and pen in hand he sunk back in his easy-chair before his desk.

It was daylight and the sun shone bright through his window when he woke. Mrs. Brent was even yet asleep. Neither had moved from the position he had last remembered.

He was about to call aloud and waken her, when he saw a postscript to the letter he had commenced to Harry, in a large, strange handwriting.

Startled, he read these words:

"Your uncle must not omit to tell his ~~son~~ nephew that the fair Lucille now on her way to Sunderland Castle in England, will be the wife of the man who swore to possess her—the scorned and hated

"LE CLARE."

"Great Heaven, what does this mean?" cried the merchant, looking at the lines in wonder mingled with alarm. "Wife—wife, wake up and hurry to the chamber where our Lucille sleeps and see if she is there!"

Dazed, half-stupefied with the drugged food yet, Mrs. Brent staggered from the room.

In less than a minute she rushed back. Her face was white with terror, and she cried out:

"Lucille is not there. She has not touched her bed—a half-finished letter to Harry is on her table, and on it is something written by Le Clare!"

"FATHER of mercy, pity us! Our child is stolen! Call the commodore. See who is in the house. I'll find if the door is fast!"

And the distracted man rushed to the front door. It was unlocked. Not a servant was there to answer when the bell rung for them. The coachman was found in a stupor on the floor. The maid lay near him in the same condition. The remains of the supper eaten upstairs was on the kitchen table, but the coffee and salad was gone.

So was Clamora, and all her best dresses too.

"She has been in this plot!" said the merchant. "How on earth Le Clare has worked his cruel plans we may never know."

"Alarm the police—raise the town at once—don't waste a moment, or he will get beyond reach!" cried the commodore, who had been aroused from his deep slumber.

The police, all the city and military authorities were informed of this midnight outrage this bold abduction, but not a trace of the missing lady could be had.

Not until near night, when after terrible struggles, the police officer rolled off the bed to which he had been tied, in the chamber on Pell street, and pounded his heels on the floor until he attracted notice and got help, was there the least idea had of how the villainy had been committed, or what had become of the plotter and his victim.

Then everything was made plain as day.

The officer, too wise to say anything of his attempt at bribery, told a story of having discovered the intimacy of Nicodemus Sparkle with the negro woman, and of his plan to entice her on board a schooner then lying at a wharf on the "Basin," with the intention of carrying her off. He said he went to the room on Pell street to arrest Sparkle, when he was struck from behind by his disguised employer, undoubtedly Le Clare, and knocked senseless. Then tied and gagged he was left helpless where he lay in terrible suffering until found and freed from his own irons and enabled to tell his story.

On going to the wharf where the Sally Ann had been lying, it was found that she cast off and made sail down the bay a little before midnight, the night before. And on her without a doubt, Le Clare and his guilty associates fled, carrying their unhappy victim along.

All the clew left was that written by the chief villain of all—he would make Lucille his wife and take her to Sunderland Castle in England.

A poor clew indeed. For it might be written to mislead.

The Brents were in a wretched state of anxiety. No child of their own blood could have been more beloved. And it seemed so horrible that she should be in the power of one whom she so hated and feared.

An examination of the remnants of the salad and the dregs of the coffeepot proved that they had been drugged, and from the statement of the officer there was no doubt but that Nicodemus Sparkle and the mulatto cook had done that part of the work.

Mrs. Brent became very ill—hysterical convulsions appeared, and her physicians feared she would die. Mr. Brent dared not leave her, but he got the commodore to write a full account of what had occurred, to Harry, and to send it on in the greatest haste by a special courier.

If the vessel in which Le Clare sailed had steered for England, she might be intercepted before she reached the English coast. The commodore advised his brave son to make the attempt at any rate, and said were his own frigate fit to go to sea he would take that course himself.

Thus all was done then, that could be done.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE COURIER AND HIS NEWS—UP ANCHOR AND OFF.

THE officers and men of the Red Gauntlet were allowed a free run on shore after their arrival in Portland, with a liberal allowance of prize money, for what with storm, duty and drill from the very outset of their cruise they had been worked to the limit of human endurance. A rest and a change was necessary.

Harry Brent for his own part cared nothing for the allurements of society or the sports and pastimes to be found on the land. Neither did honest, faithful old Tom Breeze. The latter who often heard from the guardian and nurse of his infant, staid on board with his almost worshiped commander all the time.

Another—the noble old Chevalier Duval was a "stay-at-home," as the ship-keeping officers were termed.

The chevalier had become very much attached to his young captain. He had confided to him all his family history, only to him did he reveal all his hopes and fears in regard to yet finding his lost sister. And, as he was a well-read and accomplished man, Harry Brent found enjoyment and instruction in his society. He was an inmate of his cabin, a member of his mess and not having much duty to perform was with him more than all the other officers put together.

Half the officers and half the crew were allowed on liberty ashore at a time. The rest were occupied in setting up standing rigging, looking to the fit of the sails, seeing to every needed repair, for Harry did not intend to remain a day in port after he received the letters he waited for. He had deposited his ransom-money and jewels in sealed boxes in the vaults of the City Bank, subject to the order of Mr. Brent, reserving all the coin he needed for his crew and such expenses as might accrue in port or elsewhere he might touch and his stores and ammunition were yet plentiful. He got in a few casks of fresh water, made a contract for fresh provisions while he was in the harbor and that was all.

Suddenly, two days before the mail he expected would be due, he got an alarm which for a time almost maddened him.

It was but a single letter, brought by special courier who had ridden night and day to reach him. It brought the terrible news that the girl he so worshiped—his first and only love—the idol of his uncle and aunt had been torn from her home by an adventurer and villain. The shock at first so stunned him he could not speak.

"Mon Dieu! Cher capitaine—what is it?" cried the alarmed chevalier, who saw him sit pale, trembling, silent, with the open letter in his hand.

"My heart is broken! Lucille—my Lucille has been stolen from her home. Here, inclosed in a letter from my father, is half a letter commenced by her to me. Before it was finished she was carried off in the darkness of night by one who adds this cruel postscript to her dear words:

"Sorry, very sorry, to wound your tender feelings, Captain Brent, but you are too young to possess such a charming bride. She will in a brief time be my wife—and soon in her queenly home, Sunderland Castle, England, reign in joy and beauty, the pride of your successful rival and most devoted enemy."

"LE CLARE!"

"Sunderland—did he say Sunderland?" gasped the chevalier.

"Yes—here it is! Why are you so agitated?"

"It was a son of that accursed Lord Sunderland who drew my *sistare*, our Eugenie, from her home in France. I went to Sunderland Castle to find him and her. He was not zere. His proud father was angry to think he had

gone to France to find a bride and said he wished to see him nevermore. And now—La Belle Lucille, *your* Lucille, so much like my dear Eugenie as far as I can remembre—she, too, is connect wize ze name I detest.”

“Where is Sunderland Castle?” asked Harry, fiercely, seeming to wake as from a dream of stupor.

“On ze coast of England. Close to Land’s End. It is upon ze cliff, which overlook ze sea! Ah—it is grand. A castle of the time of Guillaume ze Normand!”

“We sail for that coast before the sun goes down!” cried Harry, stern now and yet full of fire. “It is no time to weep or regret. It is a time to *act*. If I cannot save her, I can seek revenge! Call Mr. Coffin, while I write a letter to send back by the courier!”

Soth Coffin came below.

“Mr. Coffin, hoist the signal of need and fire three guns, to call every man and officer on board. Get ready to go to sea the minute all hands are back to duty. I will explain why after you have sent up the signal and fired the recall guns!”

“Very well, sir!” and Mr. Coffin hurried to obey orders.

Three loud, booming reports rung out from the schooner’s guns and echoed far through the streets of the town, while the blue flag of recall floated from the fore truck.

The cable was shortened in by the crew on watch—the sails hung loose on the yards and in their brails on mast and boom, the guns were secured, every anchor but that which was down secured for sea, all boats but two ready to bring off the men as they answered the recall, hoisted up and secured.

“Captaining, we can go to sea in ten minutes from the time the last man comes aboard—that is, we can be on our way there.”

This was the report of the first officer, made just as Harry Brent had finished two letters—one to his father, the other to his uncle—and sealed them ready to deliver to the courier.

“Thank you, Mr. Coffin. Now sit down a moment. I have some sad news to tell you and a question to ask which may be painful to you, but I *must* do it!”

The officer saw that although his young captain was calm now his eyes were red. He had been weeping.

“I am ready to answer anything I can, captaining. I gin’rally steer a straight course myself and do nothin’ that’ll not stand lookin’ into.”

“I know it, Mr. Coffin, I know it well. No braver man walks a deck than you. But to the point! Mr. Brent’s daughter, my cousin Lucille, has been abducted by a scoundrel and carried off to sea from Baltimore, and the vessel used was the Sally Ann, owned and sailed by *your* brother, Ebenezer Coffin!”

“Holysaints! No—no, it can’t be. Ebenezer loves money, but never, *never* did I know or hear of his doing a dishonest or wicked thing. Captaining, if he *has* done this he has been imposed on, or else his vessel has been stolen from him.”

“I *hope* he is innocent. For *your* sake, I do. You know how much I think of you.”

“I hope he is, captaining, for his *own* sake. I’d help to swing him from the yard-arm with my own hand if I *knew* he was guilty of such an—”

“Well, Mr. Coffin, we sail for the English coast to cut off the Sally Ann if we can before she lands, for there it appears was her destination when she sailed.”

“Good. I’ll crowd the schooner in my watch as I never did before. There’ll be nothing slack on my part. Can I go on deck now, captaining? It seems as if I could hardly breathe, since you told me. But Ebenezer *couldn’t* do it!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT SEA—THE VICTIM IN THE TOILS.

The Brent family were not the only ones drugged on that eventful night. Just about dark Le Clare, or “Captain Bill Masten,” came on board the Sally Ann to see that all hands were on board and the craft ready to sail. And he induced Captain Ebenezer just to *try* one glass of his old bottled porter, though the latter seldom took anything but “Jamaica rum-punch hot, nor—nor—west.”

“It’s bitter stuff—rank bitter with hops or su’tin’ else,” said the captain in a tone of disgust, after drinking it.

Masten smiled. The “su’tin’”—*something* else, put the captain so sound asleep that the former tumbled him into his bunk in his clothes just as he was, and going on deck told the mate that the old man had got dead drunk and *he* was to stay on watch and have the crew up and ready to sail when he came back on board with his daughter whom he was then going after.

It lacked an hour to midnight when he came down in a carriage with a lady so helpless she had to be carried on board, a mulatto servant woman and his dandified *secretary*.

He gave the carriage-driver a handful of silver dollars and dismissed him and then told the mate to cast off, make sail and stand down the bay under all the canvas the schooner would bear.

“I’ll take the captain’s watch till he sobers

up!” he said, when the mate asked who would relieve him after midnight.

The west wind blew fresh and the water under the land-lee was smooth, so there was scarce a jar to mast or hull when she was making her easy ten knots to the hour with free sheets and helm amidships.

Before he was to take his watch on deck, Le Clare went down into the after-cabin, which he had caused to be specially arranged and nicely furnished, to see how his captive—for such we must regard her—Lucille Brent, was doing since he laid her on a bed in her state-room.

She was yet asleep with no signs of waking. She breathed softly, and looked pale, but lovely.

“De chile seems berry easy, Mars’ Cap’n—berry easy now. But when she wakes up, you be here please, for I doesn’t want to face de storm dat’ll come alone—no, honey—not much!”

“I’ll be near, Clamora—never fear. But see that she does not get a hold of anything to hurt herself with! Keep on watch—you can sleep all you want to to-morrow. I’ll send Mr. Sparkle down to keep you company!”

“Thank you, Mars’ Cap’n.”

Le Clare went on deck.

“Go down,” he said to Nicodemus, “and keep Clamora company in the after-cabin. I don’t want her to go to sleep before her mistress wakes! There’ll be a *time* then, but we’ve got to face the music!”

“Gosh all hemlock! I suppose we have. But if it’s all the same to you, sir, I’d like to keep in the background!”

“All you have to do, sir, is to obey me and draw your pay! Go below at once!”

Nicodemus did not wait. He feared those flashing eyes—he knew there was *murder* in the man if he angered him.

At midnight when the lights of the city were out of sight astern, the second watch was called and Le Clare relieved the mate in charge of the deck. The compass course was given and the vessel stood on, the wind freshening as she got out into wider water and away from the land, the well-built craft speeding away through the water faster and faster, with all the sail her spars could carry.

As the night wore on the sea grew more rough, for the bay widened out and the strong wind had a full sweep.

It was four in the morning. The mate’s watch was called. The mate had just come aft to relieve Le Clare, when the mulatto woman came rushing up to the latter.

“Fo’ de Lor’ sake come down quick, Mars’ Cap’n—she’s done woke and is jest a-ravin’!”

CHAPTER XLIV.

HELPLESS, BUT UNSUBDUED—SEA-SICK DUET.

LE CLARE instantly followed the woman to the cabin where Lucille, with pale face and flashing eyes, stood on her feet, while Nicodemus Sparkle cowered down like a whipped cur.

“Ah, villain—you are here! It is *you* to whom I owe this outrage and not *that* pitiful cur whom I first blamed for it. Where *am* I and how came I here?”

“You are on board *my* vessel, bound to England, *my* *peri*. I brought you from your chamber in my arms. You fell asleep while writing a love letter to one Harry Brent.”

“I wrote the postscript and told him I thought he was too young and indiscreet to possess so sweet a bride. So I would take you as *my* own!”

“You added that to *my* letter?” she demanded.

“Yes—and left it on your table. Your drugged salad and coffee took effect too soon, or you might have *finished* your letter before I added the postscript!”

“So—I was drugged into insensibility and brought to this vessel.”

“Yes, fair lady!”

“And my parents—were they drugged also?”

“Your *adopted* parents, you mean, lady. Yes, they and every one in the house but Clamora who is here to wait on you!”

“Yes—missis, I is here to do de berry best I can to serve you!”

“Begone, vile traitress! You were in the plot or you would not be here!”

“Dar it is, mars’ cap’n—I know’d she’d go for me!”

“Silence, girl. She will need you too much not to treat you well!”

Lucille had fairly raved when she first woke and saw Clamora and Nicodemus Sparkle before her, sitting and talking in the cabin. But she grew strangely, ominously quiet, when she confronted Le Clare.

Her dark eyes looked on him with the fire of utter hatred—her pale face was full of resolution, she did not show one look of fear now.

“Leave—leave me, *all* of you! I want to *think*!” she said, imperiously.

“It is not good to be alone. That is why I am anxious to marry!” said the wretch, willing to exasperate her, so as to arouse her from that dangerous quiet.

“You—you!” she screamed. “If there is a fiend who reigns in the nether world and he could appear in shape most horrible, I would sooner wed with him than *you*! Begone, I say, and let me *think*, or I shall go mad!”

“That state-room is *exclusively* yours, fair lady! You can be alone within *its* sacred precincts as much as you please! *This* cabin will be used by those who have the honor of waiting on your ladyship!”

“And *watching* me!” she added bitterly, as she entered her room and closed the door.

“The *storm* is over, but the calm may be worse!” said Le Clare to his secretary, as he turned away to go on deck.

It was daylight when he got on deck. Dimly the far-off shores of the bay could be seen and here and there some fish or oyster boat could be observed moving over the rough water. But out in the center of the bay not a sail was in sight.

“Durnation! Where be we? Where was I that I wasn’t called when we got under way?”

Ebenezer Coffin spoke. He had come on deck. His white face and uncombed hair gave him a weird and ghostly look.

“You mixed drinks and got dead drunk. We *tried* to wake you and could not, as the mate will testify. It doesn’t matter—I stood your watch,” said Le Clare, pleasantly. “You knew we were to start last night.”

“Me—Ebenezer Coffin, DRUNK? If I *was*, it is the first time and the last. If ever you get a drop of your cursed English porter down me ag’in, may I choke on the first swaller.”

The honest old captain seized a deck-bucket, took a turn of its rope around his wrist, threw it over and got it full of salt water.

Into this he doused his head a half-dozen times, washed his face and hands well, and then shook himself like a Newfoundland dog after a bath and wiped his face and hands on his cotton pocket-handkerchief.

“How far down be we?” he next asked of the mate.

“Nigh seventy mile by the log. I don’t know just how the tide is.”

“It ought to be ebb. We’ll sight some o’ them Britishers by noon, I’m thinkin’, ’thout we lay by till night.”

“We will keep right on,” said Le Clare. “The Britishers, as you call ’em, will not trouble me. Your papers will clear us, if we are boarded by an American, while I hold a pass that will carry us by any *British* man-of-war.”

“Queer—sart’in—powerful queer!” muttered Coffin, looking unbelief in his honest gray eyes. He then went forward to the galley and called on the cook for a hot cup of coffee.

The men were soon called to their breakfast. An hour afterward the forward cabin table was set. The vessel had been well supplied by the steward whom Le Clare had hired, who waited also on the cabin table.

A most appetizing breakfast was spread in the after cabin for Lucille by herself.

Le Clare called to her at her state-room door and told her so.

“Men who *drug* food to carry out their fiendish plans cannot expect a *warned* victim to repeat experiments!” she said, in a tone of scorn.

“On my *honor* I *swear* there is not, shall not any drug be placed in your food or drink while you are on this vessel!” he said, earnestly.

“Swear by something you possess! *Honor* is not one of your attributes!”

White with anger, he turned away and went to his own breakfast in the forward cabin.

The schooner, with the wind on her quarter and every sail drawing, made rapid way through the water. By a little time after noon, far ahead were seen the tall spars and dark hulls of ships at anchor, and undoubtedly part of the British fleet known to be in the lower bay.

Ebenezer Coffin, who had stood the forenoon watch, went below after he was relieved, only long enough to get his dinner. Then he came up with his spy-glass in his hand. Uneasily he saw the vessels ahead rise plainer to view.

“Cap’n Masten, hadn’t we better haul inshore? I know a little bay where we can lay snug till dark and then scoot out unseen!”

“Captain Coffin, if you mind *your* business, I will attend to *mine*! When I chartered this vessel it was to make *my* voyage, not yours. For three months she is *mine*, paid for in advance, and I am responsible for her safety!”

Le Clare had never before taken so firm a stand when talking to the owner of the Sally Ann, and he now spoke so loud every man on deck could hear him.

“Durnation! Aren’t I anything more’n a *passenger* here?”

“You are a watch officer and navigator as long as you attend to those duties. If you don’t like that you can be a *passenger*, and I will take your place as I had to do when you lay dead drunk below!”

Poor Coffin! This last charge hit him in a tender spot.

He went below, silenced now, but very unhappy. If he lost the Sally Ann, he lost all he had, except a small sum left at his agent’s on shore as a “nest-egg” in case of bad luck.

In a little while the ships near at hand, with their colors set, could be seen plainly by a light on board. In the center of a group of half a dozen, anchored about a cable’s-length apart, was a three-decker, bearing the broad pennant of an admiral.

“Head for the flag-ship!” said Le Clare to the mate.

Then he went below.

When he came on deck, ten minutes afterward, he wore a British naval uniform, had a handsome sword by his side, and carried in his hand an official-looking package.

"We will heave to, just to windward of the admiral, and lower a boat. I am going on board to see him and get a clearance pass which will free us from annoyance hereafter."

The Sally Ann had now flying from her gaff a new British ensign which Le Clare had brought up from one of his trunks.

Standing boldly in among the ships-of-war, Le Clare ordered the gaff-topsails and flying-jib taken in and the foresail brail up.

Then—just to windward of the admiral's ship he had the schooner hove to under mainsail and jib, where she lay with helm a-lee almost as still as if at anchor.

Going below, he said in a low tone to Clamora and Nicodemus Sparkle:

"On your lives, keep close watch on the lady. If she comes out of her room while I am gone, do not allow her to pass from the cabin if you have to use force to keep her back!"

Then he went on deck, had a boat lowered and was rowed to the side of the admiral's ship.

He was received by side-boys, with man-ropes in their hands, and went over the side where officers waited to receive him.

What passed in the cabin of the admiral we may not know at present. But a signal officer was called when Le Clare came out, and by order he brought the latter a peculiar flag—blue bunting, with two white hands clasped in the center. And when Le Clare returned to his schooner soon after, that signal-flag was hoisted to the fore-truck.

Then all sail was made and the schooner again headed eastward for the open sea.

After she had got out from among the British war-ships, Le Clare went below, took off his uniform and resumed his former attire. The English flag also was pulled down and no colors left up but that singular signal forward.

Night was now close at hand. Ebenezer Coffin was again on deck. He saw that his vessel yet seemed safe from seizure and confiscation. He saw her glide by blockading men-of-war as they drew out, unquestioned and apparently unnoticed, though often within hail. That signal-flag was a safeguard and passport also.

Though the heart of the poor captain felt some easier, for this, his eyes were open with wonder. He could not understand it.

When they drew clear from the capes, the light-houses were alight.

"Shall I take bearing and distance and shape a course, Cap'n Masten?" he asked.

"Take bearing and distance, sir, if you please, and note them on the log-book. I will go below, look at the chart and give the course when I come on deck!"

He went below and was gone but a little while. When he returned on deck, Captain Coffin reported to him:

"Cape Charles west-nor'west, about seven miles."

"All right, sir—we will now flatten in our sheets a little and steer east by north—half a point northerly till further orders."

"Jumpin' Jeroboam, cap'n—that can't be the course to St. Kitts. That's away to the southward."

"I know it, sir. But I have given the course I wish steered. I make this voyage, do I not?"

"So it looks," said Ebenezer, with a sigh.

The sails were trimmed afresh, the new course given to the helmsman, and the schooner plunged forward for her voyage across the blue Atlantic.

Another day dawned, the schooner tossed and pitched in a heavy sea, the wind now so fresh that under her three lower sails, reefed down, she had all the canvas she could stand up under.

Again Lucille was tempted with a breakfast, the best the cook and steward could prepare. She came from her room, ate some toast, drank a glass of water, and then locked herself in once more.

Le Clare did not intrude himself upon her notice—he quietly kept an eye on her movements, without appearing to do so. As Captain Coffin now stood his watch, it gave the former all his time to himself.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE RED GAUNTLET OFF—FIRE AT SEA—THE VAILED LADY.

WITHIN three hours from the arrival of the courier with his news all hands were on board the Red Gauntlet. The courier was sent on shore in the boat that brought off the last absentees, and as he mounted his horse to start on the first stage of his return journey the schooner's sails were spread to the breeze, and she headed east for her flight across the ocean.

Harry Brent seemed like a new man to his officers and crew. Before he had been the gayest, most light-hearted creature on the vessel. Now, silent, moody and stern he paced the deck, sometimes watching the compass, fretting if sail was not carried for all the spars were worth.

He ate scarcely anything—he seemed to be sleepless!

"*Mon capitaine—if this continues you will die*

and you rescue not La Belle Lucille, neither will you have ze power to revenge!"

This is what the good chevalier said to Harry Brent when the third day passed, and pale, weak and hollow-eyed, he walked the quarter-deck and refused to go down to supper when called.

"You are right—good, true old friend! But it is so hard! Night and day I hear her voice as I heard it in that dream, calling on me for help, and I cannot reach out a hand to save her!"

"Are you not sailing so fast as you can to her rescue? Call on *ze bon Dieu* to make your heart strong and be still—what you call *patient*—you eave have ze good fortune. Hope yet for ze same! Eat and drink, and keep strong, for if you meet *him*—ze monster who 'ave done all zis wrong, you must *keel him*!"

"Yes—yes—even had he twenty lives they would not suffice for the agony she must endure. You are right, chevalier, I will be a man!"

And Harry went to his table and once more took food heartily and drank his coffee as he formerly did.

And he slept—slept his whole night watch below, and woke fresh and vigorous, for a bath and breakfast on the fourth day out.

The wind had hauled a little, but it threw him very slightly to leeward of his course, close-hauled, and the schooner made fine speed.

Five, six days had passed, and the same monotony prevailed. Watches regularly relieved, two hours' drill, morning and evening, inspection, and nothing more.

On the seventh day, a little before the mid-watch was called, a sail was sighted dead ahead. The lookout said she was square-rigged, and at first sight supposed her coming westward, almost head on.

But as she rose slowly to sight, it was soon known aloft and on deck, she was standing the same way that the Red Gauntlet was steering.

Harry Brent, though he noticed her, seemed to care very little what she was—whether friend or foe.

The day passed, and they neared the stranger slowly, but surely. At sunset she was hull up, and Mr. Coffin had reported her a merchantman, though he could make out no colors. She had fallen to leeward so far the Red Gauntlet, if she held her course, would pass two or three miles to windward of her.

The wind had freshened to a full topsail gale, the sea was heavy, but the schooner rode over it like a bird.

Seth Coffin respected the mood of the young captain too much to suggest bearing down toward the ship, which, though she had shown no colors—for none were raised on the schooner—was evidently English.

Night fell, very dark, and to windward the sky looked threatening. They had reduced sail to topsail and the three fore-and-aft sails on the schooner.

Suddenly a shout on deck reached his ear and startled him and the chevalier, who was reading by the same table, sprung to his feet and cried:

"*Parbleu! What can zat be?*"

"A light—the ship's afire!" was the cry. Harry hurried on deck. He was met by Mr. Nettles, the watch officer at the head of the companionway.

"That ship to leeward is on fire, sir—bad too. We had just made out her light, as we thought, when there was a blaze and now she is all aflame fore and aft, or so it looks."

"Up helm and bear down for her! Call all hands, sir. Clear away our boats and see them ready for service!"

"We've but one boat that will live in this sea, sir—your gig is whale-boat built and she *might* live!"

"Have her clear then—her people must have taken to the boats by this time!"

"Heaven help 'em then, for it's fearful rough!"

"Take in the topsail and brail up the foresail, so we can lay to close to windward!" was Harry's next order as the schooner rushed down swift on the flaming ship with her sheets free.

In a brief time they luffed to not half a musket-shot to windward of the ship.

A single boat was seen full of men for an instant astern of the ship and then over she toppled, ill-managed or loaded down with human freight—that was lost to sight in a second in the heaving seas.

On the deck, plain to be seen were yet several people, and they waved their hands as if beseeching help.

"Man my boat—six oars only, to leave room. I go in her myself. Lower away!" shouted Harry.

"Captain, let me go!" cried Tom Breeze.

"Yes, take the after oar. We sink or swim together, Tom!"

In less time than it can be written the whale-boat-built gig was afloat and struggling toward the ship over those mighty masses of tumbling water.

The sight from the Red Gauntlet was awful. Every mast on the ship was a spire of flame—every spot except a little space on the after-deck seemed a seething mass of fire, and there, piteous sight, a group of people—women among them—crouched in the red light, no hope for them.

Yes—the faintest chance. Harry Brent, his steering-oar in hand, drove his boat fairly under the stern.

"Leap—leap for your lives into the water!" he shouted.

The men and one woman did so, and were dragged one after another into the boat.

"There was another woman—where is she?" asked Harry, as his boat rose and fell close under the ship's stern.

"My daughter—oh, my daughter—she has fainted on that burning deck!" shrieked the woman who had been saved.

"Hold hard, men—keep the boat close as you can!" cried Harry, and he sprung to a rope which swung down from the stern davit where a boat had hung.

Hand over hand he went up, and in a minute was over the stern rail. Scarce a second passed—he was seen with a female form in his arms.

The men saw a face beautiful even in its pallor, and as he leaped into the sea with her the boat was pulled to the spot where he would rise.

Strong hands drew them into the deep-laden boat. Harry laid his fair burden down and sprung to his steering-oar.

"Pull, men, pull; we are under the schooner's lee, and all will be well yet!"

His voice was strong and cheery, but his face was flame-scarred, for he had to confront the flames to reach her where she had fallen.

A brave pull and a strong one and the boat was alongside the Red Gauntlet.

One by one the rescued people were raised in bowlines over the sides.

Then the crew, and by his own order last Harry, hooking on the boat-tackles himself, went up in the boat as she was hoisted to her place.

The schooner now shot ahead and then wore around the ship to see if a survivor of all who had taken to the boats could be picked up. Not one was seen. And when it was learned that, coward-like, all the officers and all the crew had taken to the boats and left those seven passengers, five men and two women to their fate, there was little care expressed for the lost.

Harry saw the great masts and yards come tumbling down on the sinking hull, and then hastened below, where his surgeon and the chevalier looked to the blistered and scorched sufferers whom he had rescued.

"Noblest of men! To you I owe my dear daughter's life!" cried the elderly lady who had first been saved, as Harry advanced. "Gussie, my love, behold your preserver!"

The young lady, tall graceful and very lovely, rose from the lounge where she had reclined and advanced to take the hand of him who had delivered her from an awful death.

She looked in his face, then on the ring worn on that hand, and gasped:

"It is fate! We meet again!"

Her voice was low and tremulous—it only reached his ear, while the glance of her dark-brown eyes entered his very soul, so intensely bright, but he recognized it. The veiled lady whose warning saved him at *Tadousac* was before him.

"I am Lady Lonsdale, of Elmshurst, and this is Augusta, my only child!" said the one who next advanced to take his hand and reiterate her thanks.

Of the gentlemen—one was her private secretary, two were merchants from Quebec, a fourth was the son of Mr. Drummond, whose birthday supper Harry had so rudely interrupted, and the fifth was a nephew of Lady Lonsdale.

"I am bound to the English coast," said Harry Brent, after all had been introduced to him, "and will land you in safety at the nearest point I reach. Until then, every comfort my cabin affords is at your free service."

"Generous as you are brave!" said Augusta Lonsdale, impulsively, while she glanced at the emblem she had placed on his finger.

He blushed. But never for a second could the bewildering beauty of the fair being before him withdraw one thought of loyal love from the one he feared was lost, yet yearned to rescue if she yet lived to be saved from a villain's cruel grasp.

Leaving the burned ship to sink in her embers and smoke, the Red Gauntlet was again put on her course.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LE CLARE UNMASKS—TELLS ALL HIS TALE.

LE CLARE wisely kept aloof from the after cabin for day after day as the schooner sped along over the trackless sea, and ordered Nicodemus Sparkle to do the same. For he knew how especially repugnant the fellow was to Lucille Brent.

Clamora was so repentant, so humble and so anxious to serve her whom she still called mistress, that Lucille allowed her to wait upon her.

Thought—that best friend to those who need its aid, helped Lucille in her first dark hours of distress.

The first thought that brought comfort was this.

Le Clare in his triumphant success had boasted about writing a postscript to her letter which she had partly written to Harry when overtak-

en by the drowsy effects of drugged food and drink.

And she thought her father would forward that letter to Harry, and thus the latter would know whither the villain aimed to take her.

And her second and happiest thought was, Harry would sail for the English coast and rescue her, if rescue was possible! He never would leave her to a horrible fate.

Thus, with this hope in her heart, she grew stronger, brighter, more fearless as the voyage lengthened, for she believed that on or near the English coast she would see or hear from him to whom her heart was all devoted.

They had been eighteen days out and were fast nearing the English coast. Le Clare began to wish to sound the feelings of his captive and to see whether the plans he intended to act upon when he landed would be resisted or submitted to.

Questioning Clamora, he learned one morning, when he knew his voyage was near its close, that Lucille was very pleasant and had asked the girl to find out how soon it was expected land would be seen.

He thought in such a state she would grant him an interview.

So he sent in a politely worded note, asking if she would kindly permit him to hold a short conversation with her on matters of very great interest.

She wrote a single word under his application. It was not very flattering—yet it was all-sufficient. It was—

"Yes."

He dressed himself with great care, *this time* in his naval uniform as a British officer.

When he entered the after cabin where she was seated, he bowed low and respectfully. He then said:

"I appear before you, Miss Brent, now for the first time in my *real* character, and shall now give you my true name, and if you will permit it, will explain every motive which has guided me in conduct which I acknowledge must seem to you to have been outrageous."

She inclined her head in cold assent.

He proceeded:

"My name is Clarence Wilson. I hold the rank of master in the British navy, and am on a furlough from that service. I was appointed through the influence of the late Lord Sunderland, to whom my mother was related.

"When his lordship died he was supposed to have a son living, to whom his title and his vast properties would descend by the laws of the realm. This son had been estranged from him by making a marriage of which the father disapproved. But when the eldest son died, his lordship used every means in his power to find this younger son and call him back to his home and heart.

"He sent an agent out for this purpose. I was that agent, for wicked as you may think me, his lordship loved and trusted me. During his lordship's lifetime I sought in vain for his heir. But just after his death I got a trace of that heir. On the clew I proceeded to the country where he had settled in a wilderness home, with his lovely and loving bride, where a child had been born to them. But, alas, I reached the spot where he had dwelt too late. He was dead. I got all the proofs of his death—I have them now with me in this package, with other important papers. I sought for his widow—she died broken-hearted within a year from the time he perished. But she left a child. For that child, the sole heir of the vast Sunderland estates, I sought long and wearily.

"I held the register of its birth and baptism, the certificate of marriage which proved that birth legitimate, a full description of the infant, even to a birth-mark which the physician present when it was born swore to. I hold his statement among my papers, also the statement of the parish priest who baptized the child and buried the parents.

"I am thus specific in every detail to show how carefully I searched for the lost heir, and for proof which would place the heir in possession of the estate when found.

"After a long and weary search I found the heir. It was almost by accident. It was when as an Englishman I was forced to assume another name and a disguise.

"Until then I acted a true and honest part. When I found this heir, and even discovered by a cunning ruse the birth-mark, which was proof irrefutable, I approached that heir still with intentions pure and honest in all but this. I meant when I revealed the facts which would place the heir in possession of this vast estate to ask for a portion to be allotted to me for my share in its recovery.

"Now comes the point and the pith of this real drama of life. I pray you listen kindly, calmly.

"This heir was a woman. Young, gifted and wondrously beautiful. Is it wonderful that mercenary motives were all forgotten and swallowed up in another passion?

"She had been given by her dying mother into the charge of two kind and noble people, who adopted her as their daughter, gave her their name and she knew no other parents.

"I would have revealed all of this to them, in

all honor and reverence, but in the wild fervor of a passion I could not command, I went too fast and too far and was driven in scorn and contumely from the presence of her I would have died for!"

Lucille did not speak. Pale and trembling she sat and gazed on the man who spoke so low and earnest, she believed he uttered truth in every word. He continued:

"The father of that woman, was, when he died, just after his father's death, Cecil, Lord Sunderland. The mother, once Eugenie Duval, daughter of a nobleman of Lorraine in France.

"The name of the lost, and by me discovered heir is:

"LUCILLE, Lady Sunderland. Known in America as Lucille Brent. On her neck, between her shoulders, is the birthmark described in the certificate I have. It is—"

"Hold, sir. You need not describe it, or the cowardly manner in which your base tool, Nicodemus Sparkle managed to discover it! I understand that now."

"Well, Lady Sunderland, for such you are and as such I humbly address you, you have heard all my story.

"I thank you for your kind forbearance which has enabled me to distinctly state the whole history of the case. You know why I have abducted you, brought you away from those who would have crushed me, had I fallen into their power. I had no other choice. There, prejudiced as you were against me, I could not gain your ear. I placed you where, willing or unwilling, I could at least state the facts and plead my cause.

"I am not poor. Lord Sunderland left me a legacy, which makes me independent, if not rich. I am educated, of good parentage. If I continue in naval service, promotion will follow. Will not all these advantages balance the fascination of an American sailor boy not yet out of his teens and induce Lady Sunderland to look favorably upon the boundless devotion of a man—"

"Stop—STOP, sir, right where you are! I have listened thus far in patience, but when you presume to plead for yourself in the name of *manhood*, after having proved yourself the vilest of the vile, consorting with a negro slave and a clerk kicked in disgrace from employment, to carry out your nefarious plans, it is time you were checked! When you would exaggerate your own lofty attributes, lofty enough to deserve still higher elevation, that of a hangman's scaffold, and then try to belittle a younger, nobler, braver, more honorable rival, it is time to check your insolence!"

"Lady Sunderland, you forget something. I am patient and enduring. I have borne much from you. I have let you cross the ocean in absolute peace. I have endeavored to make your unexpected voyage just as comfortable as it could be. I repeat—you forget something!"

"You err, sir. I forget nothing!"

"You act as if you forgot that you are yet completely in my power—on board my vessel, where every creature is my servant, to do my will, not yours!"

"Will you be my willing wife, enter at once upon your vast properties and reign a very queen in a palace of your own, or must I take a course I abhor in my inmost soul, to force you to accede?"

"Your willing wife? No, a thousand times NO! Trusting in the help of ALMIGHTY GOD, I defy you!"

"Land ho! Land on the weather bow!" came a shout from on deck. "And a sail, close aboard!" shouted the same voice.

"It is Harry Brent, and he will save me!" shrieked Lucille.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HELP COMES AT LAST—A VILLAIN DIES AND RIGHT PREVAILS.

"It is false! It is not, cannot be his ship on this coast!"

This was all the villain shouted, ere he rushed on deck.

The very second he left, Captain Ebenezer Coffin stepped into the cabin where he had lately stood.

"Here, lady, here, take this. You may need it soon!"

He handed her a loaded pistol.

"I've heard him all through and now I know who you are, as well as who you have been! And I'll help you out of this scrape, if it is in the power of an honest man to do it. He has fooled me from the start. I own this schooner—and, there, some one is coming. I must go on deck, but mind, scream if he offers to harm you and I'll come. Shoot him down if he raises a hand to hurt you!"

The good captain hurried from the cabin and out on deck, just as Clarence Wilson rushed back into the cabin. The former saw, and shouted to his brother Seth on her deck, the Red Gauntlet close aboard—bearing right down on the Sally Ann.

"She's here! She's here!" he screamed. Cap'n Brent, make haste to save her!"

A shriek rung shrill from below, then loud and ominous a single pistol-shot.

Ebenezer Coffin rushed below when he heard

this and at the same moment the hulls of both vessels struck together.

As Coffin entered the after-cabin, he saw Lucille standing with a smoking pistol in her hand and he stumbled over the body of the man now known as Clarence Wilson.

He was not dead, for he tried to crawl toward Lucille with a flashing dagger in his hand.

"Consarn yer skin, drop that knife!" cried Ebenezer, as he kicked it clear from the hand of the would-be assassin.

Now came a new, a glad surprise to our heroine. Harry Brent and Seth Coffin, close followed by the Chevalier Duval and a half-dozen of his marines rushed into the cabin.

Lucille, saved from falling by Harry, who caught her in his arms, fainted.

"Where is the wretch, Le Clare?" cried Harry, while he held her to his bosom.

"Dying, curse you, DYING! Thank Heaven 'twas by her hand—by HER hand! I can bear it best from her I loved so madly to the last!"

Gasping, the blood coming up from his throat for the ball had pierced his lungs, the man rose to his knees.

"Harry Brent, you've conquered! Call her to life—I did her no harm—I would have killed her that we might die together. 'Twas not to be—here—here these—these are Lady Sunderland's—proofs—proofs—forgive me, Heaven—"

He choked! Great clots of blood gushed up, one quivering spasm, and he was still.

"Take her to her state-room—don't let her see it!" said Ebenezer Coffin, and he pointed to the corpse. "Thank mercy, I've got the Sally Ann yet, now he is dead!"

The body of the dead man was carried into the outer cabin and the papers taken from his grasp, which, with his latest breath, he pronounced "Lady Sunderland's proofs." When, restored to consciousness by the efforts of Harry and the chevalier, our Lucille opened her eyes and saw who stood around her, she murmured:

"God heard my prayer and sent me help in my hour of need. Praise be to His holy name!"

Then, as Harry Brent in tender, manly words tried to assure her of his joy that she was safe and by his side, she looked around and asked, with a shudder:

"Where is that bold, bad man? He had a dagger at my breast and swore we both should die, and I—I think I shot him!"

"He is out of your way and mine, dearest. Do not think of him. Here are some papers he said were Lady Sunderland's proofs for her!"

"Yes, yes, they are mine. I am Lady Sunderland, the daughter of Cecil, Lord Sunderland and Eugenie Duval, his wife!"

"Eugenie Duval? My sistare!" cried the chevalier. "Did I hear you say zat?"

"Eugenie Duval, who died Lady Sunderland, was my mother. These papers prove it!"

"Ah, mon Dieu—I thank Thee one is left! La Belle Lucille is my sistare's child. She is my niece. At last—at last, I shall not be all alone when I die!"

"Ebenezer, my brother, is an honest man, capting!" cried Seth, who had exchanged a few words with him. "That rascal deceived him, chartered his schooner for a Southern voyage, hired his own crew, and took her where he pleased when he got outside. Till half an hour ago Ebenezer never knew she was on board, and then he gave her the pistol that saved her life!"

"Take my hand, Captain Coffin. Your schooner is your own, and we'll put a crew on board who'll know you as captain!" cried Harry Brent. "Now, come all of you on board the Red Gauntlet. I have English friends there, who knew Lord Sunderland well."

"Where is Sunderland Castle?" asked Lucille.

"In sight. We are right off the little harbor that belongs to the estate. I have a pilot now on board to take us in. I was going there to wait for you when the Sally Ann was seen coming in, and I stood out to meet her!"

"And I am heir to it, and I know not what else—vast fortunes he told me, when he tempted me to be false to you, my first, my only love!" cried Lucille.

"It is wonderful. I run a risk in landing, but I shall do it, and you shall possess your own, if I never share it!"

"Harry—my Harry! You hold my heart; my hand and fortune, too, shall yet be thine!"

"Then I ask no more on earth!" said he. "Come—come all except a guard and crew to hold this vessel till good Ebenezer is ready to sail for home."

They passed at once to the deck of the other craft, where the eyes of Lucille opened in wonder when she saw two of her own sex, and one of them very beautiful, on his deck.

"Lady Lonsdale, this is the Lucille Brent of whom I told you and your fair daughter. She is the lost heir of Sunderland and holds all proofs now in her hand, given up by the villain who abducted her for his own wild, ambitious aims!"

"Lady Sunderland, I salute you as the betrothed of one of the bravest, truest knights of chivalry that ever lived!"

And with these words Augusta Lonsdale kissed Lucille on both cheeks, while her mother embraced her tenderly.

"So—you are Cecil's child!" she said. "I

knew him well. He was a gallant scion of a noble race. And you have come to your own! How wonderful a Providence! We were about to land, when the vessel came in sight which bore you hither! But you do not ask why we, being English, are on your promised husband's decks. He saved our lives from a burning ship at sea and had to bring us home."

"I need no explanation. All is right which he does!" said Lucille, proudly, as she looked on her lover's manly form.

"To your cabin, all, kind ladies, now!" said Harry. "We will make sail and stand into the little harbor. You can talk there, at your convenience, while our decks are clear to work ship!"

The way was led into the cabin by Lady Lonsdale. Lucille followed, with Lady Augusta on her arm.

"Mr. Coffin, go with ten men and help your brother bring his craft in port!" said Harry to his first officer. "I have the pilot, follow me in to anchor!"

"Gosh all hemlock! What is ever to become o' me?" groaned a voice on board the Sally Ann.

Poor Nicodemus Sparkle, ever doomed to crushing disappointments, was now in the worst "fix" of all his life.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

GOOD NEWS FOR HOME GOES O'ER THE SEA.

ONCE more master on his own deck, Ebenezer Coffin was a happy man. Had he had his own way, he would have tossed the body of Clarence Wilson into the sea, but Seth, with a cooler head, told him to let it remain where it was until Harry Brent decided how it should be disposed of.

In two hours the Red Gauntlet rounded to in a small deep bay almost under the battlements of the great Gray Castle whose towers for two hundred years had stood as landmarks to many a mariner who swept into the channel marked by the well known point "LAND'S END."

Scarcely had the Red Privateer dropped anchor, when the Sally Ann stood in and rounded to close astern, coming to anchor with short scope in the land-locked bay.

A large barge was seen coming from the shore soon after, and as neither vessel had shown any colors those on the boat seemed fearful when near to come on board.

"Don't fear us!" cried Harry. "We're harmless, if we have teeth. They're not loaded and will not bite."

The boat then came on, and a portly gentleman, an old white-haired man, followed by two other elderly men came on board as it reached the side.

The first announced himself as the attorney for the estate, the second was the Major Domo, or custodian of the castle, the third was the old butler, who had served in that capacity for two generations in the family.

Lady Lonsdale recognized and was recognized by all three, as was her fair daughter, the Lady Augusta.

When Lady Augusta told them who was in the cabin near, the daughter of Lord Cecil and the heir to the estate, and took them in where the old lawyer saw her and all her proofs which, when he read, he said would stand before all the courts in the realm, these old men were wonder-stricken.

Nevertheless, their welcome to the Lady Lucille was honest and hearty, and they asked her at once to land among her people and to assume her rights.

"We have near neighbors who will rejoice to honor your ladyship," said the old attorney. "Admiral Lord Parker has returned but yesterday from America to his castle, and I will send express to him that you are here. He was your father's friend when his father's heart was stone toward him."

"Then I too have a friend near at hand!" said Harry, for he thought perchance ere he left those dangerous waters he might need one. "Let him know from me—one Captain Brent would rejoice to grasp his hand once more!"

It was now asked if these officials of the castle knew one Clarence Wilson.

Yes—they knew him as one their late master put more faith in than they thought he deserved. His youth had been full of wild escapades, and he had been sent to sea to keep him from doing worse. He had been lost sight of since his lordship's death.

When told where he was and that he was dead, punished by one he tried to assassinate—they did not say who, the attorney advised that he be buried without show or ceremony, for no more was necessary.

It was decided next that the castle should be prepared to receive Lady Sunderland the next day, and then Lady Lonsdale and her daughter would land with her.

For fear something might occur to draw an enemy upon them, Harry quickly decided on one thing. It was to send the Sally Ann back to Baltimore with the glad news to his father and uncle, and to start her without an hour's delay.

Therefore, taking the "Le Clare" crew and mate on board the Red Gauntlet, Harry gave

Ebenezer Coffin a mate and ten good men from his own crew, and as soon as he and Lucille could prepare letters, she was ordered to sail.

Nicodemus Sparkle in irons, went back a prisoner. Clamora was to work her passage back as cook. The last order was, the moment the schooner got off soundings, to sew up the body of the ill-fated, wicked Clarence Wilson in a hammock, ballast it well with iron, and sink it in the sea to eternal rest.

To save his craft, in case he met English men-of-war, the pass and the signal that Wilson procured from the admiral in the flag-ship were still kept for use.

Happy indeed was Ebenezer Coffin when this time he took his bearing and distance and laid his course for home.

CHAPTER XLIX.

TRAPPED AT LAST—SUNSHINE THRO' THE CLOUD.

JUST before sunset, the castle barge was seen coming off again. This time two officers in uniform were seen in its stern.

Harry called to the chevalier quickly to form his guard, for he recognized the gallant Parker and his son as the coming visitors.

The admiral embraced him as he would a son, and his son Geoffrey was quite as warm in his salutation. And when he learned what had brought our hero there and the result, and that Lady Sunderland, was in the cabin with his old friends, Lady Lonsdale and daughter, he hurried in to greet them all.

For a little while he talked with the ladies in the cabin, and then came out to have an earnest talk with Harry. His face expressed anxiety.

"Your presence cannot long be kept a secret on our coast!" he said. "And once known, men-of-war would be sent to intercept and capture or destroy a vessel which has been so marked as an enemy to England on the ocean. Though I would risk life to save you, it would be beyond my power, I fear, if some of our ships could hem you in in a port like this with no escape—where you must surrender, or perhaps fighting, go down."

"It worries me sadly. Let me advise you the moment Lady Sunderland lands to-morrow, to leave her to my care and that of Lady Lonsdale. She can here hold her own, and you, when this war ends, as soon, very soon I am sure it will, honorably to both countries, can return to claim your peerless bride!"

"It is precisely what I desire and intended to do, if only my Lucille consents!" said our young hero. "I feel she will be safe with those to whom I have proved a friend when I had the power!"

"More than that, a savior to me and my men, as you were to Lady Lonsdale, her daughter and her shipmates on the burning ship."

"Well, be it so understood!" said Harry Brent.

"Remain with me to-night and use your arguments upon my dear Lucille and aid me to prevail on her to consent to this separation for a time. I think when she is told it is for my safety, she will consent."

"Heaven grant it be so. They expect me at the castle, but my son Geoffrey shall bear my excuses and I will stay with you!"

That point settled and the young officer sent on shore in the barge, the evening was devoted to pleasure.

When Harry told Lucille what he wished, she said:

"No, no! If you must go back now, let me go with you!"

He dreaded this and as a last resort told her he would not take her from the ancestral home now hers by right. He would risk death, or a British prison if she wished—but he never would bear her away from Castle Sunderland, gained at such agony and risk.

Then the old admiral "put his oar in." He told her he was sure that peace would soon be declared and Harry, if he went free from danger now, would be able to come back and claim her as his bride.

He conquered.

At a late hour they retired to rest, with the understanding that an early landing of the ladies should occur and that as soon as this was done, the Red Gauntlet, homeward bound, should put to sea.

The sun rose bright and clear on the morning when Lucille, so queenly in her new dignity, yet to Harry Brent, tender, loving as of yore, was to take possession of her palatial home.

The great barge of state belonging to the castle, with its old oarsmen, gray in service, was alongside. The ladies were ready. In the cabin Harry had said the last words of adieu, alone with her he loved. Now, bravely he stood on the deck with the admiral to see them off.

Suddenly the face of the old officer flushed and a sound like a groan broke from his lips.

"Too late! Too late! You have staid too long!" he cried. "Look there!"

"Run up my colors. Stations every man. To your guns, Tom Breeze—to your guns, my brave old man!"

This was the cry of Harry Brent, as he saw standing across the harbor's mouth, in the open

sea, three large ships-of-war, the English colors full in sight.

"Admiral, please take the ladies to the land," cried Harry. "I will sink before my flag comes down."

"All may go but me!" cried Lady Lucille. "I share the fate of him who sought this peril that I might be saved."

"I may save you yet. Give me a boat. I outrank all who command there," cried the admiral.

A half-dozen seamen manned the gig of Harry Brent, and in it the old veteran dashed swiftly over the water toward the fleet.

Meantime, at quarters, springs on his cable to throw his vessel broadside to sea, every gun shot, Harry Brent stood and waited to know his doom.

Out to sea the swift boat sped, and in her the heroic admiral stood upright, waving his cap as a signal that he would board the nearest vessel, a double-banked frigate, which with her two yawning batteries lay just off the harbor in short range of the Red Privateer.

He was seen, then recognized, and in a few moments the crew of the great ship was heard sending up cheer after cheer as he ascended her side. No more popular officer existed in the British navy than the then admiral, Lord Parker.

Almost instantly after he got on board this frigate a signal flew from her fore-truck. Had Harry Brent been as able to read English as well as American navy signals, he would have known it said:

"All captains on board the flag ship for consultation."

He knew soon what it meant, for with his glass he saw an admiral's broad pennant go up to the main on that frigate, and a boat leave each of the other with an officer of high rank in full uniform in her stern, pulling direct to the first frigate.

These boats were received with the honors due a captain in the navy, and Harry intuitively understood what was going on—a consultation as to what course should be taken.

There he was, cut off from the sea. If he landed his men and blew up his ship, he and his men would be prisoners in a hostile land. There seemed to be no choice between a desperate death, and what to him was dishonor, a surrender.

That surrender might mean death to all, since England had threatened to regard privateering as piracy.

For almost an hour, stern and silent, that young hero paced his deck. His men, at quarters, were stern and calm as he. The match-fuses were all alight and smoldered on their linstocks, ready to be applied to the doubly-shot guns.

One hour—almost another, passed. The conference must have been stern and bitter in the cabin between those veterans of the proudest navy in the known world.

At last, drums rolled and the boatswain's shrill pipes rung loud, and the honored admiral was seen coming over the side, into the boat in which he went from the privateer.

The oars were raised, the boat pushed off, and down with a flash with one motion every oar took water.

Swiftly came the little craft to the schooner, and the admiral seated in quiet dignity held her tiller-ropes.

Steering alongside, he leaped at a bound over the low rail.

"Captain Brent," he said, so loud every man could hear him, "I have saved your ship, your lives, your honor!"

"I have taken it on myself to explain all to the king and the Lords of Admiralty."

"You are pledged, through me, not to fire a hostile gun on this our coast of England, except in self-defense if fired upon. You are to sail hence within the time of two hours, with colors flying, free from all opposition. And this, because of your noble conduct to our men and my ship when in dire distress on your coast, and in consequence of your gallantry in saving Lady Lonsdale and her friends at sea and the errand of mercy which brought you to our shores."

"When you assent to this fire a lee gun, and you will see every ship outside dip her colors to your honor, in salute, and make sail back to her station as one of the Channel Fleet."

"Fire the lee gun!" was the prompt answer Harry made, and the great cliffs, and the towers and battlements of the old castle echoed with the loud report, while the crew of the Red Privateer burst out in three loud, happy cheers.

At the same moment every ship outside lowered and hoisted her flag three times, and Harry answered by "dipping" his own proud colors.

Then the frigates made sail and soon were lost to view. The way to sea was clear. A mountain's weight was lifted from that brave young heart.

"Now, right willingly Lucille consented to go on shore and claim her own. To wait there until Harry could return under the protection of peace to claim the hand she was so ready to yield to his keeping."

The parting was not now so hard. A second ring, the gift of Lucille, nestled beside that which Augusta Lonsdale had placed on the hand of our hero.

The parting with the old admiral was, to Harry, as if he was leaving his beloved and honored father.

Tenderly parting from her he might not see for years, with grateful blessings poured on him from the other ladies, Harry sent the great state barge to bear them and the good admiral to the shore.

Then—nine loud cheers from that gallant crew as the anchor of the privateer ran up to her bows and her white canvas rose upon her lofty spars.

Slowly at first, as loth to leave a scene of triumph, the beautiful vessel began to move—then as top-gallants and royals swelled to the filling breeze faster and faster still, till like a snowy cloud decking every spar in a fleecy sheet away she went through the blue waters from the scene of her last, her greatest peril.

Harry, proud, yet sad—glad to have saved his ship and crew with his honor bright, stood and gazed landward. It made him only sad that his heart's dear love was left behind.

But he heard the brave old chevalier say:

"Do not despond, *mon cher capitaine*! We will soon see my niece, your bride, La Belle Lucille, again!"

"Yes—yes!" said Harry. "Fear not, my heart is strong again!"

CHAPTER L.

"GOSH ALL HEMLOCK" TRIES COLD WATER.

EBENEZER COFFIN never carried sail so hard before in all his life as he did to get off that English coast.

Brief was his delay when he hove to to give burial to the man who had played so many parts—Le Clare, Bill Masten—and at last had gone down to death by a brave woman's hand in his own name as Clarence Wilson, foiled in every part of his dark and diabolical plans.

When in irons, broken in spirit and terror-stricken at his almost certain future fate, Nicodemus Sparkle heard the sullen plunge of that weighted body in the sea, he groaned out in agony.

"Gosh all hemlock! He is gone and I wish 'twas me! Better to die and be buried than to live and suffer as I must. Why ever was I born?"

Just three weeks later, when the Sally Ann, which had once more run the blockade in safety, was within sight of the spires of Baltimore, the poor wretch, with a courage seldom given to *dudes*, but in his case the courage of despair, crept on deck unseen till too late, just as he was leaping to a watery grave in the bay.

It was better. He had transgressed a law which would have doomed him to a life long servitude at hard labor, after having had his body lacerated with the cruel lash when he had endured the peltings and jeers of the rabble from the pillory and stocks.

Clamora, landed to be sold from an easy life as a petted house servant to wield the hoe long as she could lift it in a Mississippi corn-field, was not so well off as he.

There was joy in the old Brent mansion when its long-grieved inmates received the letters brought to them by Ebenezer Coffin. Their child, for in her letter Lucille told them she was yet their own, had reached her fatherland in safety, was the honored head of a noble family, and when the white angel of peace once more spread her blessed wings over land and sea would not rest until clasped hand in hand, lip pressed to lip, she once more saw those she loved best of all on earth, except *one alone*—her GLORIOUS HARRY—the commander of the Red Privateer.

"How will Harry ever get off that coast?" was the question Mr. Brent asked Ebenezer Coffin, after the first exuberance of joy over the news left the merchant in a condition to think.

"Don't fear for him. He has more lives than a cat. Nothing on 'arth or sea daunts him! If the coast was lined with seventy-four-gun ships he'd run by 'em all. And besides—*don't forget my brother Seth* is with him. And Seth is a screamin' delight among sailor-men! What he don't know, isn't worth knowin'."

Mrs. Brent shuddered when she heard how "Le Clare," as she had known him, ended his career.

And then, strangest of all, to think the brave Chevalier Duval, whom they had been so glad to befriend, should turn out to be an uncle to Lucille, that the "Sistare" he so long and vainly sought, should have been the poor lady whose last hours they consoled by their more than Christian kindness.

A courier was at once employed, and with a liberal purse to hire relays of horses, sent to carry the glad news to Commodore Brent if he was yet in New London, or elsewhere if he had gone thence and his next port of destination was known.

Let the courier go. Let him speed over the land, while the people with staring eyes wonder

what new orders he may be bearing to those who were defending their native land. We too are on an errand. We want to know as well as he where the *old commodore* can be found.

It was two long months since that night when he lay drugged and helpless in the house of his dear brother, and Lucille had been dragged from her happy home. And in all this time he had not heard from her or Harry. He only knew the latter had sailed to attempt her rescue.

He went to sea himself, as soon as his frigate was ready and once more manned with a full complement of officers and men. Standing off the coast, for the blockade had been temporarily broken by a storm which sent the British fleets to shelter, or to find a safe offing from the shore, he found nothing in his way until the morning of his second day out.

Then, just as day broke, a sail was sighted close aboard, and two more in sight to seaward of the first.

The rattle of drums beating the "long roll" to quarters, rose from both frigates at once, and almost simultaneously two flags rose on the ensign halliards. One was the starry flag of freedom. The other the red cross of St. George of England.

And, like giants stripping for a contest to the death, both ships took in all light sail and under good working canvas, steadily closed one upon the other.

"Ready with your port battery!" cried the grim old commodore, whom we have learned to know and love. "Get in the first fire if you can—ready all, luff, at the helm there, luff! Now let her have it, boys—NOW! Fire!"

From truck to keelson—from stem to stern, the great ship quivered with the shock as eighteen heavy guns with but one voice thundered out and sent splintering death into the sides of the opposing ship.

Quick came back the response almost as harsh—but weakened by the loss of the first fire.

Now wrapped in clouds of smoke, scarcely to be seen but by the flash of their guns, yard-arm and yard-arm almost locked, the two ships lay, dealing out death and destruction as the mad thunderstorm tears through the falling forest.

A half-hour passed—it seemed more like a half-day, and the fire on both sides slackened some. Guns dismounted, decks slippery with human blood, marked havoc on both ships, yet like fierce animals, wild with the taste of gore, they battled on.

Suddenly, on the side opposite the enemy, a dark hull loomed up in the smoke, and the eyes of the old commodore flashed fire as he cried out:

"Man the starboard broadside. We are DOUBLE-BANKED!"

For he saw a new enemy to battle with, but not for an instant did he shrink, though he shouted:

"Nail a flag to the main mast-head. If sink we must we'll go down with colors flying!"

Ah—what was that? Bringing cheers for the grim old War Cloud from a hundred and fifty throats.

A sharp hull, red as fire itself, glides in between him and the sloop-of-war that has just fired her first gun at the War Cloud, and a burst of flame from the Red Gauntlet tells the new enemy she has found her match and not a half-beaten foe to deal with.

One broadside, muzzle to muzzle, then the privateer shooting ahead, raked the sloop fore and aft with her other battery and in the smoke laid her aboard.

With a shout—"a bas l'Anglais," the chevalier and his trained men sprung on those blood-stained decks—Harry and fifty pikemen followed fast, and cutlass and pistol did short and fatal work.

Beaten—disheartened, their crew more than half swept down by that last raking fire, even British bravery had to yield, and down came the flag that no longer "ruled the waves."

And from the War Cloud, cheer on cheer rose, for her opponent, too, had given in to the grim endurance of another Brent, and both ships were in the hands of those who "fought for sailors' rights and the freedom of their native land."

It was indeed an hour of triumph. Sickening when you looked at shivered hull and tattered sail—at broken spars and decks covered with dead and dying men, but glorious in *this*—right had conquered might!

It took hours to fit the vessel for running in to port and while this was being done, the brave old commodore clasped his heroic son to his manly breast and heard his glad story.

With him he rejoiced that a few more such victories would bring England to her senses and she would yield an honorable peace.

They did not then know that victory on victory in other seas, had been gained under the starry flag, nor could they foresee what history tells, that Baltimore attacked was by her sons all bravely held and the enemy repulsed, while one of her bravest children wrote the lines which can never die—"The Star Spangled Banner forever shall wave o'er the land of the free; o'er the homes of the brave!"

They could not tell how Perry on Erie's

wave, or McDonough by Plattsburg's bloody shore, should strike the tyrants down—how grim Old Hickory at New Orleans should repay the dastard wrong which burned Washington and disgraced modern warfare—but they could work and hope and pray for a peace that might last between nations of one blood and one tongue till time should be no more.

It came at last. History tells us that. And then—her guns laid aside, even her vermilion sides changed to that color which is the emblem of peace the wide world over, the yacht Red Gauntlet, with her owner and his wife on board, still commanded by Harry Brent, now a *captain* in the navy, on a year's well-earned furlough, sailed for the English coast.

Loud rung the pealing castle-bell, when Lady Sunderland welcomed her dear foster-parents to her grand old ancestral halls. And loud rose the cheers of her glad retainers, when, taking him by the hand, she led Harry Brent to the front and said:

"Here is my husband—your lord and mine—the hero of my heart's love!"

Admiral Parker was there, and Geoffrey, his son, with a blushing bride—Augusta Lonsdale had been her name—and they added to the circle of joyous men and women who gladdened over the reunion of hearts long sundered, at the plighting of vows too sacred to be ever broken.

Reader—are you satisfied? I am, for my wild, true story is at

THE END.

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